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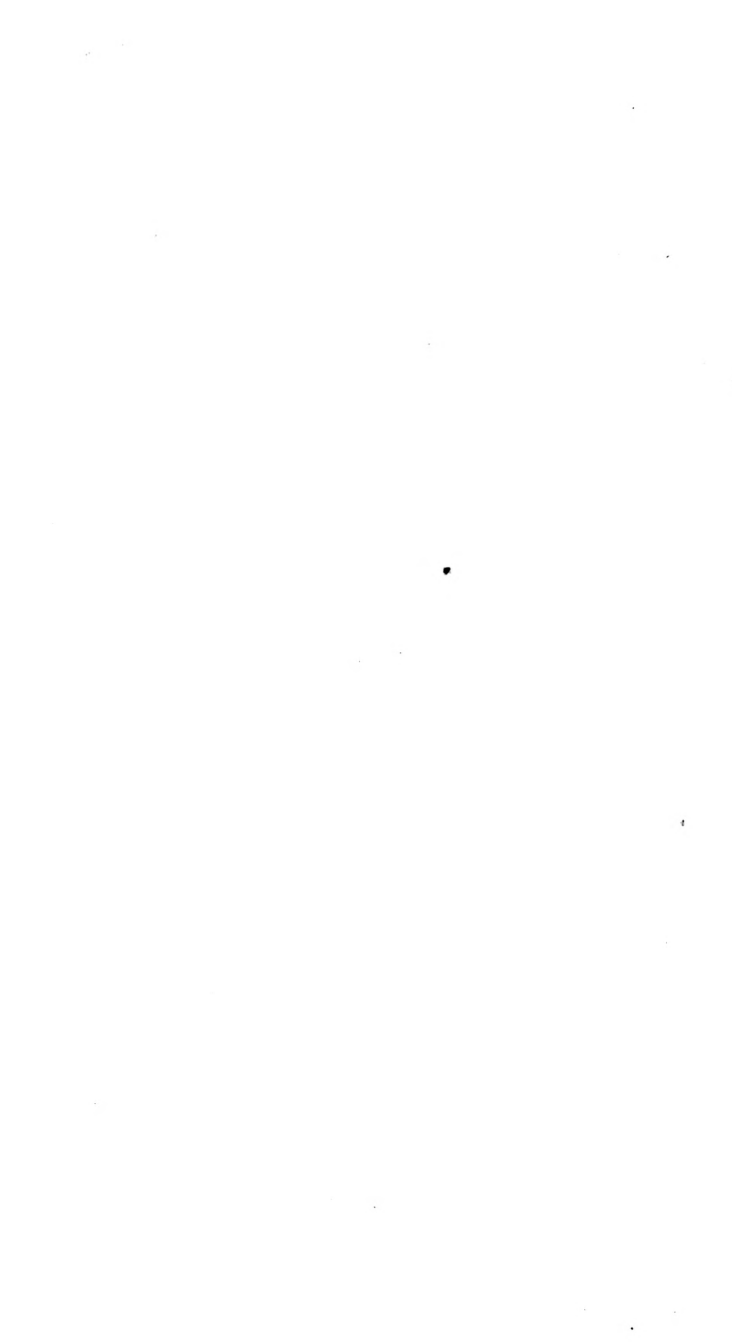
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INTERESTING
NARRATIVES

FROM THE
SACRED VOLUME,
ILLUSTRATED AND IMPROVED.

BY THE
REV. JOSEPH BELCHER.

FROM THE SECOND LONDON EDITION.

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PREFACE.

WHOEVER has taken a view of the literature of the present age, must have been pleased with the efforts made, in a thousand different ways, to simplify and extend the most important branches of information, both human and divine. The day has for ever passed when the key of knowledge was confined to a privileged class; the door is now thrown open, and even the poorest are invited to partake of the feast of intellectual pleasures.

But while religious truths have been simplified, they have, in too many cases, been presented to their readers in a manner that appears to the writer of this volume objectionable. Fiction has been

blended with facts, and while the imagination has been pleased, the mind has become enervated and unfitted for solid and useful studies.

It furnishes no answer to this objection to say, that there are a class of persons who will not read unless a subject can be placed before them in a novel and striking light; for, is not truth presented in the volume of Revelation in its most delightful and engaging dress? And will not the interesting narratives of the Bible continue to live and to impart instruction when the most popular writers of fiction are altogether forgotten? A desire to direct the minds of the inquiring to the volume of truth was the object of the writer in commencing this work; and if the feeble attempt he has made to illustrate and improve some of the facts of the inspired records should induce abler persons to pursue the path he has marked out, he will cordially rejoice.

Blackheath Road, Greenwich.

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NARRATIVES.

THE SOLEMN INQUIRY.

GEN. III.

Did not his heart within him burn,
Touched by the solemn tone ?
Not so ! for, never to return,
—Its purity was gone.

MRS. HEMANS.

THE natural disposition of man to inquire into the past conduct of his fellow-creatures has been frequently the subject of remark. We feel that we are but the creatures of a day, and standing on the common stage of life, we ask about the events which occurred before our entrance, look around upon the scenes moving before us, and die while inquiring what shall be after us. This spirit of curiosity may become useful or injurious to us, as we improve or abuse it. Kept within due limits, it leads to important discoveries ; but carried beyond those bounds, it draws away our attention from the most important pursuits, and perverts our faculties to the study of momentary trifles.

To gratify our desires for useful and important knowledge, it has pleased God to make a large portion of the Holy Volume a relation of the most interesting events in which man has been concerned. We thus learn much of the character and will of Jehovah ; we see the evil nature and awful effects of transgressions of his law ; and we learn, from facts presented to our view, the way of escape from his anger, and the method of reconciliation with him. The goodness of God is thus made apparent, both in the revelation he has been pleased to give us of himself, and in the manner in which it has been presented to us.

Turning, then, to this only authentic history of the human race for many of the first ages of the world, we inquire briefly into the history of man, the cause of his present unhappiness, and especially the important connexion between him and his great Creator.

We cannot go back to the primeval state of our first parents without feelings of the greatest admiration and gratitude. How beautiful, holy, and happy were Adam and Eve when they first came from the hands of their Maker ! What striking illustrations do their persons furnish of the power, the wisdom, the benevolence of their Creator ! How lovely and desirable their residence ! Its fruits and its flowers are alike delightful ! All that man can desire has been placed

at his feet by the Creator and Friend who has constituted him the governor of the whole earth.

Nor were the blessings of a spiritual kind which the Creator had bestowed on Adam less numerous or striking. He who had formed man of spirit as well as matter, imparted to that spirit a sense of his favour, and from day to day condescended to hold intercourse with it. Delightful indeed must have been the interviews between the Father of spirits and the souls he had made ! The holy communion and interchange of thought between kindred minds presents the nearest resemblance to this friendship between heaven and earth ; but even this falls almost infinitely short of these scenes of Eden before humanity became stained with sin.

The reflecting mind must be impressed with the fitness of the entire allegiance of man to his Maker. The creature should adore his Creator, the subject should obey his sovereign, and the servant should promote the interests of his master. Hence it was desirable that some test should be instituted by which the authority of Jehovah should be manifested, and the dependence of man should be felt. Adam could not then sin against society, for it did not exist ; and thus the test must be one relating to God himself. This test is known to be that of abstaining from the fruit

of a certain tree, which was pointed out by infinite wisdom. So long as this requirement was regarded, man would be happy ; if it were violated, he and his posterity would be the subjects of the wrath of God. The fitness of this test must be readily seen : it tended to cherish in the minds of our first parents a sense of their dependence upon God,—it would operate as a check to the undue gratification of their animal appetites, and their natural curiosity,—it was a rule very easy to be observed,—and could not be severe in itself, as it only regarded one tree, and left them the opportunity of gratifying their full desires with the fruits of all the rest.

How long our first parents continued in an obedient and happy state we cannot tell ; but several circumstances lead to the conclusion that it could be but for a short time. During this period, however, all was felicity. The world was theirs ; their Maker was their friend ; the past called for their gratitude ; and the future was contemplated with confidence. Angels were not happier, nor could infinite wisdom and love contemplate the scene without pronouncing “all very good !”

But alas ! this felicity did not long continue. We are called to visit the garden of Eden under circumstances of agonizing sorrow. The bright

luminary of day is just withdrawing his glorious beams from Paradise, and setting in the west ; when Jehovah appears in the garden, as usual, to hold intercourse with man, in whom he has so much delighted. But how changed the scene ! Adam, who had been accustomed, with a heart overflowing with joy, to come to meet his Father and his God, has now retired, as he supposes, from the Divine view, and attempted to hide himself among the trees. What is the cause of all this ? Why should the God of love have to propose the striking inquiry, “ Adam, where art thou ? ” What, has man begun to suppose his Creator is his enemy ? Has he found a being who can make him happier ? Or has he discovered that he is most blessed when living at a distance from the fountain of felicity ? It was certainly impossible that almighty wisdom had done him wrong, or that infinite love had changed in its regards to him. The mind of man must contemplate this question with astonishment and awe ; and its consideration must fill every well-regulated heart with grief.

The very proposal of the question seems to imply the anger of Jehovah. He had created man, and put him into Eden, where he had supplied his wants, and given him every proof of his favour. And is this the conduct which he

ought to meet with in return? What cause has God given, that his creature should thus flee from his presence?

Nor does the question appear less adapted to induce in Adam a spirit of self-examination. He must well know that the eye of Omniscience was upon him; and that the inquiry was designed to penetrate his heart, and induce feelings to which he had hitherto been a stranger. The blessed God employs powerful means to direct our attention to ourselves, and to convince us how awfully we have sinned against him.

But in the midst of all, we must see that infinite benevolence mingles itself with the inquiry. Jehovah does not appear in the garden clothed in vengeance; he does not come to destroy man, even though he has sinned; but he condescends to inquire, and to reason with him as to his conduct. How vast the love which the Supreme Being is thus pleased to manifest to us; strange that we should be disposed to hate and to disobey him!

But we turn to the culprit, who has been compelled, as every sinner shall be, to appear before his Creator and his Judge. Nor can we doubt, when we see him, the cause which led to his withdrawment from the sight of God. We see in his countenance the power of his conscience.

We perceive his deep sense of his guilt, and his conviction that he deserves punishment. Memory now forcibly presents to him the opposition his conscience made to his eating the forbidden fruit, and the recollection fills him with horror. Well, then, may he be burdened with sorrow.

Still it is a matter of lamentation that the transgressor manifests nothing like true repentance for his sins. He has now no real love for God. He fears his wrath, he denies not his claims to his obedience, he refuses not to answer his inquiries ; but alas ! he does not implore his pardon, he tacitly throws the blame of his sin upon his Maker ; and thus shews how rebellion against God blinds the understanding, hardens the affections, and perverts the whole soul.

But who shall describe to us all the emotions which pass now through Adam's heart ! He cannot hide himself from God ; his sins are open to the Divine view, before whom he stands a convicted culprit. He has approached the forbidden tree, he indeed knows good and evil, but all the bias of his soul is to the latter, and the punishments due to sin are overtaking him in rapid succession. We pity the unhappy subject of sorrow, but we feel that the whole blame of his condition rests on himself. We are compelled to admit the infinite justice of the Deity in his

expulsion from Paradise, while we adore the mercy which permits him for more than nine hundred years to continue on earth.

And higher still must our admiration rise when we hear a just God—at the same time that he declares his displeasure against sin and pronounces upon our first parents the sentence of death—graciously promises redemption through the mediation of his own Son, who should die in their stead, and bring in an eternal salvation for all who believe in his name. Guilty indeed must be the man who, having ruined himself by transgression against God, perfects his destruction by rejecting Jesus, the refuge from the wrath to come.

The whole subject thus viewed should impress our minds with the nature of sin, as disobedience against God ; we should learn that all our unhappiness arises from departure from holiness ; we should feel the folly of attempting to extenuate transgressions against the Divine law, and should confess all our transgressions against him ; and finally, seeing that Jehovah has been pleased to make overtures of mercy to us, and has published reconciliation through the death of Christ, we should thankfully accept the blessing, and yield ourselves to his service.

THE FIRST MURDER.

GENESIS IV.

To the broad earth's farthest verge,
Me the ALMIGHTY's curse has driven ;
My crime pursues me everywhere,
And ' Vengeance ! vengeance ! ' cries to Heaven.

Woe is me ! my brother's blood
Echoes through the wild sea-shore ;
It murmurs in the hollow blast,
It thunders in the torrent's roar.

WHITEHOUSE.

To the contemplative mind, it must needs be a source of pleasure to survey the earth when newly created by Almighty power. It was designed by infinite wisdom, intended to illustrate the divine benevolence, and was built for the residence of man, one of the noblest works of Jehovah. It presented beauty and glory ; its completion was celebrated by the songs of angels ; and its great Creator pronounced his work "all very good." Man, in a peculiar and complete sense, was hap-

py. The earth and its diversified scenery charmed his sight; the various sounds of its inhabitants were melody in his ears; and its fruits were pleasant to his palate. The companion whom God had created for him, was all he could wish her to be, and, what was better than all this, he was on terms of friendship with his Maker, and held constant communion with him.

But, alas ! while we indulge ourselves in the contemplation of this delightful scenery, we are reminded of the awful change that has taken place. Man has offended God by rebelling against his laws ; and, now the divine favour is withheld, angels look at us with pity, and devils with triumph ; the earth is cursed for the sin of man, while its various inhabitants rise up in opposition to him, and man himself is awfully degraded, the energies of his mind are contracted, and his prospects of future glory are obscured. Unless a Mediator is found, to reconcile him to God, he must perish without hope ; and except his soul undergoes a new creation, he cannot dwell in the future paradise of bliss.

The awful consequences of the fall of Adam were soon seen in the barrenness of the earth, the wildness of the brute creation, and the bad passions, the diseased bodies, and the dying frames of the human race. The first-born of our pa-

rents is introduced to our notice as a sinner and a murderer. Let us enter on the short and affecting history, and be concerned to derive improvement from it.

It is perfectly natural, when parents are blest with children, to entertain the highest hopes of their future excellence and happiness. When our first parents had sinned, Jehovah graciously promised a deliverer; and when her first-born entered the world, Eve imagined that *he* was the promised Messiah. It shewed her faith in the promise of God; but she did not then know that, before the Saviour appeared, it was necessary that the awful nature of sin should be made fully evident, and that the providential arrangements of Jehovah would take four thousand years to accomplish his designs, and bring "the fulness of time" for the appearance of Christ. She could not suppose that her beloved child had brought into the world a depraved heart, which would lead him to rebel against God, distress his parents, and murder his brother. Well might the wise man check inordinate joy at the birth of a child, and ask—"Who knoweth whether he will be a wise man or a fool?"

There can be little doubt but that Cain and his brother Abel were both instructed in the knowledge of God, so far as their parents themselves

knew him. But, valuable as is a religious education, and powerful as are its restraints, it does not always preserve its possessors from the most awful crimes. Depravity is deep-rooted and inveterate ; and when all may appear amiable and promising without, dispositions of the most sinful nature may be rankling within the heart. Cain presented an offering to the Lord. He did not slight the forms of religion ; but, alas ! that offering was not composed of the proper materials, nor was it accompanied with suitable feelings. Hence, while the offering of Abel, of the firstlings of his flock, presented in humble expectation of, and dependence on, the promised Messiah, was accepted, the sacrifice of Cain was rejected by that jealous Being, who not only requires us to pay him homage, but expects it to be done in the way of his own appointment.

Persecution, or opposition, to those who serve God in an acceptable manner, seems inherent in the human heart. As men, since the fall, are naturally haters of their Creator, they must dislike those who enjoy his favour, and are concerned for his honour. When the fire from heaven descended, and shewed the divine acceptance of Abel's offering, and the same token was withheld from Cain, it called into exercise all his strong feelings of jealousy and hatred towards

his brother. The affection he owed him by nature seemed to have fled, and revenge, however unreasonable, to have taken its place ; and as he could not shew his opposition to God in any other way than injuring his brother, he selected the most hateful methods in which to manifest the malice that reigned in his bosom.

It has often been remarked, that religious disputes rise higher than any other ; and we see it exemplified here. True, Abel has imbibed much of the spirit of that world to which he is rapidly hasting, and he shews the meekness and the affection which adorn the saintly character ; but this spirit increases the rage of Cain, who is only influenced by Satan. His anger knows no bounds, and he is careless as to the consequences of shewing that disposition. Wearing the mask of friendship, he invites Abel to the field, where they had probably often held brotherly intercourse ; and there, his smothered rage bursting forth, and strengthened by its apparent suspension, he deprives him of his life.

What a series of reflections rush into our minds as we contemplate this awful fact ! Perhaps death had never before entered our world ; and how affecting the thought, that the first departure of a human being from our earth was occasioned by a murder, and that murder the re-

sult of eminent piety in the person of its subject ! What must have been the feelings of our first parents, as they looked upon the remains of their beloved son ! Well might they call him Abel, and *mourn* ; well might they say that “ man, at his best estate, is *vanity*.”

On the supposition that Abel was the first who entered the realms of felicity from our world, we cannot but imagine that feelings of delight would fill the breasts of each of the angels on his account ; while they would, if indeed it were possible, feel a momentary horror at the means by which he was dismissed from earth. But his sufferings are now over, and he shall for ever enjoy an infinite reward for his attachment to the service of God ; angels hail him as delivered from the sufferings and persecutions of a sinful world, and as being their companion for ever ; and Jesus must view him with holy delight, as being the first fruits of that harvest of immortal souls given him as the reward of the sufferings he had engaged to endure.

But what are the feelings of the wicked fratricide ? Who can describe the agonies of his conscience, or represent the horrors of which he is the subject ? The scene is viewed with an awful interest by the Supreme Governor of the Universe ; and it is not long before he calls the

• sinner to account for his crimes. Cain acts the hypocrite even before his Maker, denies a knowledge of Abel, and impudently asks—"Am I my brother's keeper?" We are shocked at such conduct on his part ; but do *we* never exemplify his spirit? Do we never profess that before God which we never felt? Do not we willingly remain ignorant of misery which we could readily relieve? Do not we sometimes cherish the spirit of Cain towards perishing sinners, and make but little exertion for their salvation? And will not God surely visit us for these things?

The despair of Cain, when he was sentenced by Jehovah as accursed, and to be a vagabond in the earth, was indescribably awful. The Supreme Governor, by some mark, distinguished him from all other men, and threatened the most tremendous punishment to him who should take away his life. Thus did he long continue him in the world, shewing men the dreadful consequences of transgression, by his suffering the vengeance of divine wrath. What distinguishing mark he bore, we cannot say : perhaps it was, as *Saurin* suggests, a garment different from those worn by others ; possibly it was some mark on his forehead, as some have thought ; or might it not have been the agony of despair

depicted in his countenance? His feelings must be most acutely harassed, or he would not have exclaimed, "My punishment is greater than I can bear!"

The question has been asked, "Who could take vengeance on Cain for the death of Abel, when we read not of his having any other relatives, his father and mother excepted?" A moment's consideration must convince the inquirer, that, though Moses has not mentioned the fact, there must have been many inhabitants on the globe besides them. A very learned writer, referred to by *Saurin*, supposes the melancholy event to have occurred in the year of the world 128; and shews, that by that time, there might have descended from our first parents not less than 421,164 persons. Among such a number, Cain might well imagine there were many who would be disposed to revenge the death of such a man as "righteous Abel."

We will not attempt to describe the misery which Cain felt through the remaining part of his life. He travelled from place to place; then attempted to drive the load from his mind by engaging in the building of a city, and employing himself in business: but all was in vain. He endured a life of misery, and is exhibited as an object of infamy to the end of time.

“ His life is an oppressive load,
That hangs upon him like a curse ;
For all the pleasure—thoughts that glowed,
Are now extinguished by remorse !
And death ! oh, death ! ’tis worse ! ’tis worse !
How dreadful in the grave to lie,
Yet sleep not !—evermore to nurse
The worm that will not, cannot die !”

Let it ever be the concern of each of my readers anxiously to guard against those risings of anger which are displeasing to God, and which lay the foundation of unhappiness to ourselves and others ;—let us learn the impossibility of concealing sin from the eye of Omniscience ; and may the consideration that all our actions and thoughts are open to his view, preserve us from transgressing his law ;—let us reflect on Abel as a type of the holy Jesus, who manifested the spirit of love and of meekness when murdered by his enemies ;—let us see that sin will be followed by the reproaches of conscience, the faithful witness for God in every human breast ;—and may we ever recollect that Jehovah will avenge himself on every transgressor. The day of punishment may be long deferred, but a period will come when we shall receive the reward of our doings before an assembled universe. The last great day will bring to light many transactions that have been hitherto concealed

from human view, but which the Judge of all will fully disclose. "For there is nothing hid that shall not then be revealed."

THE DELUGE.

GENESIS VI. VII. VIII.

Behold the wrathful Deity enthron'd
In darkness awful, inaccessible,
And order almost into chaos changed ;
Tremendous gloom ! that blots the sun's bright beams,
And more than midnight's horrors shroud the skies !
The faint grey twilight gleaming through the clouds,
Discover, floating on a shoreless sea,
The chosen eight embosom'd in the ark,
One family preserv'd to renovate
The world Jehovah's judgments have destroyed.

S. HUGHES.

VERY few historical events are adapted to make so deep and abiding an impression on the mind as that recorded by Moses, in the book of Genesis, which is usually spoken of as *the deluge*. It is one of the facts which infidelity has never been able to account for. All nations, in some form or other, have preserved memorials of such an event ; constant discoveries of a geological kind are giving us new proofs of the fact ; and we may ask the man who rejects the Bible to tell us when this event occurred, why it took place, and what were its designs, but he will be unable

to give us a reply. We do not intend to examine this subject very critically, but are desirous to present to our readers a few of the leading facts connected with the event, and to suggest some of the lessons arising out of it.

We learn, then, that from the period of man's first apostacy from God, the depravity of his heart was manifested in the whole tenor of his conduct. As the human family increased, the energies of its different members were devoted to sin, and the whole earth became full of moral pollution. Century after century rolled along, and men "waxed worse and worse." The justice of Jehovah was roused, and infinite purity threatened the exercise of Omnipotence in the destruction of his enemies. Noah, an eminent servant of God, was instructed to declare the Divine determination to punish men for their sins by drowning the world, to exhort them to repentance, and to testify his own faith in the message he delivered by constructing an ark, or floating house, in which the Supreme Being graciously promised to preserve him and his family.

Noah, believing God, was found obedient to his commands. The ark was begun, and the design completed, in all probability, amidst the contempt and the opposition of his ungodly neighbours. The hatred of the world has always

been, and always must be, the lot of the pious ; but he who receives as infallibly true the testimony of heaven, will only be influenced by a sense of his duty. Noah was unmoved by the opposition of man, and actively engaged in the duty to which God called him. How happy must be the created being who feels that he is doing what his Creator commands ! He may bid defiance to the opposition of earth and of hell.

Infidels have attempted to laugh at the size of the ark, and to represent the impossibility of its containing the multitude of creatures who were commanded to be contained in it. But it would be well for such persons fairly to calculate, before they reject statements which millions of the wisest and best of the human race have believed. We will take the very lowest computation, and reckon the cubit at only eighteen inches, though strong arguments might be adduced in proof of its being twenty-one. But reckoning it at eighteen, the ark was four hundred and fifty feet long, seventy-five wide, and forty-five high, nearly half the size of St. Paul's Cathedral, in London. It was divided into three stories, independent, probably, of the hold below, and would contain, as shewn by Dr. Hales, 42,413 tons burthen, being about the size of eighteen of the largest ships now in use, and capable of carrying 20,000 men,

with provisions for six months, besides the weight of one thousand eight hundred cannons and all requisite military stores. Who, then, can doubt its capability of containing eight persons, two hundred and fifty-pair of four-footed animals, (for to this number, according to Buffon, all the various species may be reduced,) and what fowls, insects, and reptiles could not live in the water, with provisions for twelve months?

The ark was built, the scoffers laughed, but God was serious. In the sixth hundredth year of Noah's age, on the seventeenth day of the second month, answering to November 17, in the year of the world 1656, and before the incarnation of the Messiah 2348 years, he entered that abode, with his wife and family, and the beasts he had been commanded to preserve. And now, amidst the thunders and the lightnings of heaven, the fountains of the deep were broken up, the clouds poured down their torrents, nay, every part of creation threw its moisture to the surface of the earth, and the water continued to increase in height for about six weeks, till it covered the tops of the highest mountains. O what consternation, what agonies, what terrors would now be felt among those who had rejected the word of Jehovah! Very long was the forbearance of the Governor of the universe exercised, but his wrath

fell unspeakably heavy at last. How clearly would it now be seen that, "though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished!" Men may be found, from year to year, rebelling against God, but what are they when his anger rises against them? Many of those who had assisted Noah to build the ark were now destroyed. Millions would ask for mercy when it was too late. Oh, sinner, remember that God will assuredly visit thee, and that thou must render to him an account of thy opposition to his government. Awful, indeed, must have been the destruction of the whole world, when it was far more populous than at present; and still more terrible will be the period when the Lord shall summon the whole human race to his bar, drive his enemies from his gracious presence, and burn up the earth with fire.

But amidst the mighty and awful ravages of human life, and of worldly beauty which passed around him, Noah, with his family, was safe. He who had disposed him to render obedience to his commands, had carefully shut him in the ark, steered it amidst the contending elements of nature, and, after a residence of more than a year within it, placed him again on dry ground, and constituted him the deputy governor of earth. They are well kept who are guarded by Jeho-

vah ; and they are highly honoured who honour Him.

Delivered from the deluge, which had plunged the whole world, excepting themselves, into ruin, the holy patriarch presents unto God the first burnt-offering of which we read, designed as an atonement in behalf of the remnant that was left, and “for the making of a covenant with the Lord.” They who are preserved in a season of peculiar calamity, should consider themselves bound to be entirely God’s.

This whole subject shews us that Jehovah will certainly punish the wicked, and save his own people ;—it proves that God blesses some persons for the sake of others ; as the children of Noah were saved for his sake, though *one*, at least, was not holy,—so sinners are saved for the sake of Christ. It illustrates the infinite importance of seeking salvation from the wrath to come in the way of divine appointment, and of cleaving to Jesus, who was so clearly typified by the ark ;—it encourages us to avow our faith, in the worst of times, and before the vilest sinners ; and it proves to us, that though God may delay his coming to judge the world, yet “that day,” as in the instance of the flood, “shall come suddenly,” throwing millions into awful confusion, and “as a thief in the night.”

THE SERVANT EXPELLED.

GEN. XVI. XXI.

Ah, be not sad, although thy lot be cast
Far from the flock, and in a boundless waste!
No shepherds' tents within thy view appear,
But the chief Shepherd even there is near;
Thy tender sorrows and thy plaintive strain
Flow in a foreign land, but not in vain;
Thy tears all issue from a source divine,
And every drop bespeaks a Saviour thine!

COWPER.

IN whatever view we contemplate the awful consequences of the entrance of sin into our world, we are struck with astonishment and horror. Not only has it thrown all nature into confusion, causing the ground to bring forth thorns and briars and poisonous herbs, and set the brutes in array against man, their original governor; but its dreadful effects have seized on man himself. Sin has banished him from God, and deprived him of much of his capacity to enjoy hap-

piness : it has placed him in opposition to the greater part of his fellow-creatures, and rendered his happiness incomplete with those whom he yet tenderly loves. Like a mighty earthquake it has buried most of his joys, and like the *simoom* or burning wind, it has blasted the rest. It has mixed poisons with our pleasures, and our very enjoyments are made to remind us that we are sinners, and that therefore our happiness must be imperfect.

Probably few men, in any age, have enjoyed more felicity in this world, than Abraham, "the Father of the faithful," and "the Friend of God." It is true, he had to endure great trials, but they were sweetened by the calm serenity of soul produced by faith in the Divine testimony. In addition to this, he was blest with a liberal share of the bounties of Providence, with the honours of his fellow men, and with the society of an amiable wife. But, alas ! his enjoyments were imperfect, and even his domestic circle afforded him much uneasiness. His wife Sarai, or, as she was afterwards called, *Sarah*, had a thousand charms ; she was distinguished for the loveliness of her form, and the beauty of her countenance ; she appears to have been a woman of warm and affectionate feelings, and enjoyed the highest regard of her husband ; but, alas ! she had no off-

spring. Children, by the people of that age, were highly valued, because they very essentially aided them in their labours, and contributed to their comfort ; besides which, each believing female indulged the hope of being the mother of the promised Messiah ; but they were withheld from Sarah. What added to her anxiety on this subject was, that God had promised to Abraham “ that his seed should be as the dust of the earth, so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then should his seed also be numbered.” But year after year had passed along, and no sign appeared of the fulfilment of his word ; the consequence of which was, sorrow on the part of Abraham, and still greater grief on that of his wife.

It is a sad proof of the depravity of the human heart, and should deeply humble us in the reflection, that we are prone to disbelieve the testimony of God. Even Abraham, eminent as he was for his faith in the Divine word, fell into this crime. Indeed, it is remarkable, that the Holy Spirit has been careful to record the failings of his most eminent people, in the very excellences for which they were conspicuous. Job, with all his patience, cursed the day of his birth, and murmured against the providence of God. Peter, with all his zeal, denied his Master ; and John, notwith-

standing all his love, forsook him. And so Abraham, on more than one occasion, acting on the principle of unbelief, sought to obtain good objects by improper means. When God had promised him the blessing, the most implicit confidence ought to have been placed in his word ; and, had he entertained proper views of the Divine character, he had not fallen into the sin of distrust. Ten years elapsed, and as both he and his wife were descending into the vale of life, and the probability of having children consequently decreasing, Sarah suggested to her husband that he should go in to her maid Hagar, by whom she thought the promised children might probably be borne. Ah ! thou unbeliever ; knowest thou not that though God may delay in the fulfilment of his promises, their accomplishment is certain, even though all may be dark, and apparently opposed to their completion ? He never requires us, even in the most extreme cases, to have recourse to sinful actions to accomplish his designs ; nor are we justifiable in doing so ; and if we depart from the straight line of rectitude, we shall, in some way or other, suffer on account of it.

Hagar was an Egyptian ; it is supposed she was one of the *maid servants* whom Pharaoh gave to Abraham, when he took Sarah into his

house. Gen. xii. 15, 16. Such persons were entirely under the control of the mistress of the family. It was not uncommon for them to be raised to the marriage bed, and thus to become wives to their masters; but in this case they were reckoned inferior to the mistress, who directed their labour, and claimed its produce, while she assumed the entire control of their children, who, if she had none of her own, were reckoned as hers, and became heirs to the riches of the family. If, on the other hand, the principal wife had children, these descendants of the concubines were shut out from all claim to inheritance. This was a system which, however common, was never sanctioned by the blessed God, and though permitted in the early ages of the world, is expressly condemned in the New Testament.

If no other argument could be adduced against polygamy, or plurality of wives, it would be enough to shew us its impropriety, were we to consider the confusion introduced into the families where it has been practised, and its consequent unhappy effects on general society. It must of necessity divide the affections of the husband, create jealousy and ill-will between the wives, and foster feelings of the most improper kind among the children. This was fully illustrated in the instance now before us. Sarah

suggested Abraham's improper connexion with Hagar : the good man, without seeking for Divine direction, consulted his own inclinations, and his wife's desires, and thus brought on himself one of the greatest trials with which he ever had to contend.

Raised as Hagar now was above her former station, enjoying the love of so great a man as Abraham, and having reason to think herself more fruitful than her mistress, she soon began to assume airs of importance, to despise Sarah, and, probably, to use language and to manifest conduct altogether unbecoming her station. Sarah now began to see, in the decreasing regard of her husband and the insolence of her servant, the folly of her conduct ; and, as though she had forgotten that the whole plan had originated with herself, she throws the blame upon Abraham. " My wrong be upon thee : I have given my maid into thy bosom ; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes : the Lord judge between me and thee." There is much in this language that we cannot approve ; but Abraham, seeing the ill effect of his conduct, reminds Sarah that Hagar was " in her hand ;" intimating that he would cease to treat her as his wife, and that she was entirely at the disposal of her mistress. Though Abraham was right in acceding to the wishes of Sarah in leaving Hagar,

it by no means shewed his wisdom to place her so completely under the government of her mistress, at a time when she was under the influence of improper feelings, and disposed to act towards her in an unkind and improper manner.

In what precise way Sarah conducted herself towards her servant, the sacred writer has not told us, but has merely remarked, that "she dealt hardly with her." The Jews say, she beat her ; it possibly was so, or she might withhold from her the comforts which her situation required, or have exacted from her a larger portion of labour than she was able to perform. At all events poor Hagar resolved on leaving her ; which she did, and fled to the wilderness in the way to Shur ; intending, no doubt, to return to her native country, and report the treatment she had met with in Abraham's family, by which means she would probably have reproached the religion of that devoted patriarch.

How wonderful are the ways of God ! He entertained designs towards Hagar and her unborn son, concerning which she had no idea. He had watched over her, and directed her movements to this wilderness, from which he will deliver her, place her again in the family of her master, and make her the mother of a great nation !

It is worthy of remark, that the first appearance of an angel as a messenger to man, was on the errand of benevolence. It is a very delightful view that the Scriptures give us of these beings, as "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation." When Hagar was in trouble, and had placed herself in the wilderness, by the fountain of water, to refresh herself with its cooling streams, "the angel of the Lord found her." There is something very pleasing in the conversation he held with her. He called her by name, and reminded her of her station as Sarai's maid; thus intimating her duty to submit to the woman under whom a divine Providence had placed her, even though she might have treated her improperly. When she was interrogated, "Whence camest thou, and whither wilt thou go?" she displayed a very great degree of candour and good temper. She said, that she was fleeing from the face of her mistress, but neither defended herself, nor exposed the improper conduct of Sarah. She appeared to be sensible of the superior character of the inquirer, to perceive that he was acquainted with all her circumstances, and to leave the whole affair to his direction. A spirit like this is equally wise and profitable. We ought, in all our difficulties, to "trust in the Lord with all our heart, and lean not to our own

understandings." The angel instructed her to return to her mistress and submit to her control, promised that her seed should be exceedingly multiplied, that the fruit of her womb should be a son whom she should name Ishmael, that is, *The Lord heareth*, in commemoration of her present state of affliction and deliverance out of it ; and withal told her the character of her son, and all his descendants, by which he gave the most satisfactory proof of his heavenly dignity, which indeed has been more fully established by the fulfilment of the prophecy, that we shall just now see to have been very remarkable.

Hagar being thus encouraged, and brought, it is probable, to know more of God than she had done, shews a very proper feeling on the occasion. Having had the privilege of living in Abraham's family, she had heard of Jehovah, and had probably observed the external forms of his worship ; but now that she had seen his servant, and received favours from his hands, it is supposed, by some, that she began to love him. She acknowledged his kindness to her in her distress, and gave the well a name which should make it a memorial of the Lord's goodness to her. Having done all this, she returned to her mistress, whose heart God inclined to receive her, and in whose house in due time her son was born. Abraham, in conformity to the Divine command to Hagar,

named him Ishmael, and for several years he considered him as his promised son and the heir of his property.

We cannot forbear admiring here the goodness of God to the children of affliction. When we are cast forth from our fellow creatures, he has pity upon us, provides for us, and directs our steps. That is a blessed affliction which brings Jehovah to our help, and teaches us to love him. Hagar could never forget his kindness to her, or the solemn dedication she had made of herself to him. Nor is it unworthy of remark, that the Divine conduct towards Hagar probably led Abraham into a mistake. He now supposed that Ishmael was the child that God had promised him ; and he loved and educated him accordingly. Little do we know of the future designs of Heaven ; and as little did Abraham think that many years would elapse before the promised child would be given, or that he would be the son of his beloved Sarah. Such, however, was the assurance given him when Ishmael was about four years old, and such was the fact when he had attained the age of fourteen.

We may suppose, that for a series of years the family of Abraham lived on terms of general peace ; but when Isaac was born, unpleasant feelings began to operate. As Sarah had formerly disliked Hagar, so *she* now appears to have

hated *her*, and to have encouraged Ishmael in his opposition to Isaac, who was thus persecuted from a principle of envy. His birth was out of the common course of nature ; he was given to his parents to enjoy peculiar blessings, and had expectations superior to those of Ishmael, who by this time had become old enough to know the good things he had lost by the birth of his rival. Several years, however, elapsed before any very serious inconvenience arose to the family ; the good sense of Abraham probably leading him to act with all the moderation he could command.

At length Isaac had passed through the first years of infancy, and was about to be weaned. Such times were then seasons of rejoicing, because there was a probability of the child's life being continued,—and he began to excite the tender feelings of his parents by his interesting prattle. A feast provided to commemorate this event was not likely to please either Hagar or her son ; and when the day came, Ishmael was found “mocking” Isaac. Perhaps he laughed at him in derision, or imitated him in some of his childish actions to create sport among the spectators, or, as some of the Jews think, possibly he beat him. Sarah, who on such an occasion would be tenacious of her own honour and that of her son, saw what passed between the children ; and be-

ing aware that Ishmael was encouraged in his improper conduct by his mother, she desired Abraham to expel both Hagar and her son from the house, declaring, with much vehemence, that Ishmael should not be heir with her beloved Isaac. Here, then, we have a pretty full display of the evil of polygamy, a practice that had injured the peace of Abraham's mind, and disturbed the harmony of his family.

The patriarch had learnt by experience the folly of doing things of importance in haste. He had seen the wrong of taking Hagar to his bed ; he had felt the impropriety of her former expulsion ; his affectionate heart could not bear the idea of making them miserable outcasts ; and he therefore felt extreme reluctance to follow the counsel of his wife. We may readily imagine another reason for this,—he waited to know the Divine will ; and when he had ascertained that, he was equally ready to expel one son and to sacrifice the other. When God told him to attend to the suggestions of his wife, and send out Hagar and her son, “ he rose up early in the morning,” intimating his entire readiness to do as he was commanded.

It may appear at first view an act of cruelty on the part of Abraham, thus to treat those who demanded his affection. But let it be remembered,

he acted not from the impulse of feeling, but by the express direction of Jehovah, who, while he enjoined his servant to expel Hagar and her son, promised to make of Ishmael a great nation, because he was his seed. By their conduct too, they had merited this punishment ; they had *persecuted* Isaac ; their treatment of him arose from unholy feelings, which God determined to chastise ; added to which, their expulsion was done in the kindest way the act would admit of ; provisions being given them for their present support, and arrangements probably made for their future supply. Hagar, it is certain, felt no resentment ; and if we may judge from what passed between Abraham and Ishmael in after-times, we should suppose that he had none.

How affecting the situation of Hagar, now she was banished from the house of her master ! Seventeen or eighteen years before, she had been a voluntary exile ; but now she was “ forced from home and all its pleasures.” She resolved to go with her son to her native land ; but she soon lost herself in the wilderness of Beersheba, and was brought into circumstances which attract the strongest sympathies of our hearts. The bottle of water which they had carried out with them was soon emptied, and they were “ in a dry and thirsty land,” where no more was to be rea-

dily found. Ishmael's strength was quite exhausted, and his mother expected nothing but his speedy death. She had not courage to see him die ; his groans pierced her heart, and she feared that her tears would add to his sufferings. Laying him " under one of the shrubs," to screen him as much as she could from the rays of the sun, she went to a little distance from him ; and who can tell their mutual feelings ? The mother would think perhaps of the fountain at which she sat when the angel of God appeared to her on a former occasion, and would tremble both for her own safety and that of her son, who was then dying for the want of a little water, and withal exposed to the rage of wild beasts. Both of them would learn the folly of persecuting those whom the Lord loves, and we would hope that they cherished repentance for their past follies in this particular. Under these circumstances, Hagar might be well filled with despair : no human being was near to administer to their wants ; and though it is true that, on a former occasion, the angel of Jehovah appeared to give her direction, yet she would remember that then she was driven into the wilderness by the unkindness of her mistress : now she is banished by the command of God for her improper conduct ; she does not now seem to expect help, and, what is

worse, she does not even appear to have prayed for it. Let us indulge the hope, that if the duty was omitted, it arose from a deep sense of her impropriety of conduct. This, though it will not excuse *us* in neglecting a throne of grace, may lessen the criminality of one who never enjoyed our privileges. She ought, however, to have trusted the Being who had been her helper, and to have prayed to him for needful favours for herself and her son.

It is a fine description which is given us of the omnipresence and benevolence of the Deity in the hundred and second Psalm. "He hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary ; from heaven did the Lord behold the earth ; to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to loose those that are appointed to death ;" and never was it more fully realized, than in the case of Hagar and Ishmael. "The water was spent," and the lad was dying. God saw him, heard the language of his groans, and sent down an angel to deliver him. It was just when Abraham was about to slay his son, that Jehovah addressed him and stayed his hand ; it was when the brook Cherith was dry, the Divine Being appeared for the prophet ; the last night that Peter was to have lived, he was delivered by an angel. And so in this instance ; when Ishmael was just

ready to die, the angel of the Lord once more spoke to Hagar, to inquire into her distress, to encourage her heart by telling her that God regarded her son, who should live, and become a great nation ; and opening her eyes, she was directed to a well of water, where she filled her bottle, and gave Ishmael to drink.

“ Joyful she rose, and on her list’ning ear
Broke the sweet sound of water murm’ring near ;
She fill’d her thirsty cruise, and to the boy
Brought the cool bev’rage with a mother’s joy.”

Through the Divine blessing, Ishmael recovered, and settled in the wilderness of Paran, where, by the use of the bow, he obtained a living for himself and his mother, who, in due time selected for him a wife from the land of Egypt, the place of her own birth.

There are several subjects connected with this narrative of too much importance to be passed over. It supplies us with a most important and luminous display of the truth of scriptural prophecy. It was said to Hagar by the angel, speaking of Ishmael, “He will be a wild man ; his hand will be against every man, and every man’s hand against him : and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.” This prophecy not only related to Ishmael, but to all his posterity. Mr. Jones has well observed in his *Biblical*

Cyclopædia, article HAGAR, "It is remarkable that the Saracens, who were of the posterity of Ishmael, never set their hands to the plough, but got their living almost entirely by the bow; supporting themselves on wild flesh and venison, and on such wild fowl as the desert affords, with herbs and milk." The same writer, on the article ISHMAEL, as well as *Bishop Newton*, in his second *Dissertation on the Prophecies*, shews very clearly how the different parts of the prophecy relating to Ishmael have been accomplished, even to the present hour; and that it has ever remained impossible either to civilize or subdue the Arabs, the descendants of Ishmael. Though the influence and the armies of mighty nations and conquerors have been exerted upon them, they remain the same people, "and still preserve unimpaired a most exact resemblance to the first descendants of Ishmael." Thus, like the Jews, they stand as living witnesses of the truth of Divine revelation.

Another circumstance that we must not omit to notice is, the use that Paul makes of the subject we have been considering, in his epistle to the Galatians; where he speaks of the facts connected with Hagar and Ishmael, and with Sarah and Isaac, as an ALLEGORY. As the descendants of Hagar resided in Arabia, so they symbol-

ized the covenant of Mount Sinai in that country. It was an economy that placed the Jews under bondage. The very reading of it inspires us with an idea of slavery, condemnation, and terror, while it excludes all who violate its conditions from the heavenly world. As Ishmael persecuted Isaac, so the adherents to this covenant persecute those who are interested in the dispensation of grace. On the other hand, Sarah appears as the free-woman, and the mother of all believers ; as Isaac was born by supernatural means, so believers are born by the power of the Holy Spirit ; as he was the child of promise, so are believers included among the many nations of which Abraham was the father. This allegory is singular and instructive, but to dwell upon it would be to wander from our design, and to occupy more room than is consistent with our plan.

To bring our remarks on this narrative to a close, we may observe, that it teaches us the superintendence of a divine Providence over all our affairs, and that nothing takes place among his creatures but what is overruled to accomplish the designs of his glory ;—that we can be in no circumstances, nor in any place, but we are in the sight of God, whose eye is ever fixed upon us. This consideration, while it should preserve us

from sin, should comfort us in the season of affliction. We see, farther, the evil consequences resulting from an association with the wicked. It led Abraham into painful circumstances, and was the foundation of lasting sorrow. And finally, we learn that duties required by the moral Governor of the world must be performed, however painful their observance may be to us. If, indeed, they are hard, our sins make them so. Had Abraham never improperly associated with Hagar, he had not been called to the painful task of dismissing her from his house. If the people of God break his law, they must expect to suffer his chastisements ; and happy are they if restored to his favour, however painful the process that is carried on in their hearts to bring them back to the enjoyment of his love from whom they have departed.

THE AFFECTIONATE FATHER SACRIFICING HIS SON.

GEN. XXII.

———Most mysterious Heaven !
What hast thou said ? thine only son—thine Isaac,
A burnt oblation ! And a father's hands
To execute the deed !

FARRER.

THE venerable patriarch Abraham is immortalized, in the inspired volume, as “the Father of the faithful,” and “the Friend of God.” And what titles can be so honourable, or what honour so abiding, as that which cometh from heaven ? The tablets of brass and of marble which blazon forth the deeds, or mark the tombs of the great, are many of them already crumbled away ; and the places which at present know others shall soon “know them no more for ever.” But though thousands of years have rolled on since the deeds of Abraham were performed ; the narrative appears before us in all its native vigour and beauty. We seem to accompany him in the

most retired walks of his life, and derive from him instruction and entertainment of the highest kind.

The existence and value of the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit can only be shewn by trial. This is especially true of *faith*. Hence the blessed God has seen fit in all ages to exercise his people with the most severe calamities, "that the trial of their faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ." The faith of Abraham, whom Jehovah had chosen as his favourite and "friend," was to be handed down to future ages, to be admired and imitated ; it was therefore important that its nature, proportion, and effects should be marked by some great transaction.

The Supreme Being appears to have addressed his servant Abraham, on this occasion, in an audible manner. That voice had become delightfully familiar to him ; for during his journey through life, of nearly one hundred and thirty years, it had often arrested his attention, and called forth all the grateful emotions of his soul. With what readiness of mind, and devotion of heart, does he reply, "Behold, here I am." And what is the gracious communication which God

has to make to his servant ? for we can readily imagine that the expectations of the venerable patriarch are highly raised. Alas, never did such a sound before enter his ear—"Take now thy son, thine only Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering, upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." What a mysterious command ! How unusual a requirement this from the source of goodness and compassion ! Into what a consternation must the mind of the saint be thrown ! Perhaps for a moment he doubts whether or not the injunction proceeds from the God of heaven. But a little reflection convinces him both of the reality of the command, and of the divinity of its Author. The awful subject now becomes deeply interesting ; the command is trying ! The *man* revolts at the idea of slaying a lovely son ; but the *saint* submits to the command of the great Creator, who says, "All souls are mine ; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son, is mine." Heaven and hell watch the event in suspense ! Unbelief suggests disobedience ; but his faith is strengthened, and he hesitates not. Such a scene as this would never have been disclosed ; such an event would never have been recorded in the sacred volume, had it not been full of instruction.

Let us, then, attempt our own improvement by glancing at the difficulties of Abraham's task—the triumphs of his faith—the approbation of his God—and the lessons the subject suggests.

We think, then, on the difficulties of the task. Self-denial is essential to the genuine religion. He who has not learnt to deny himself, is yet destitute of an acquaintance with vital, practical godliness. There are occasions when the claims of religion will come in contact with our affections and worldly interests ; when it must be made apparent whom we love best, our Creator or ourselves. We are called upon, in comparison of God, to hate our nearest and dearest friends. Abraham shewed that religion had firmly taken up its seat in his heart, when he went out at the Divine command, leaving his beloved friends and his home, to an unknown land : nor had he ever repented of this conduct, for he had reaped an abundant reward. But he had never before met with a trial like this ; for he had here to struggle against the feelings of humanity : and, in this instance we meet with a combination of circumstances eminently calculated to affect the heart. Who can read the narrative without tears ? It calls up all the finer feelings of the man, and especially harrows up the sensibilities of the parent. Isaac was the son of his old age ;

promised many years before his birth ; and born at a period when all human probability of his being a father had ceased. As his youngest child, and the son of his old age, he felt peculiarly attached to him, and the trial on this account, too, would be great. He is emphatically spoken of as his beloved son " Isaac, whom thou lovest." Had it been *Ishmael*, the trial would have been severe, for even towards him he had all the tender feelings of a kind father. But it must be the child of his beloved Sarah. God calls for the fairest flower ; he demands the darling son. It must be his most affectionate child ; for Isaac appears to have been an example of obedience. He was innocent of every open crime ; he was the comfort of his holy parents, and evidently the subject of ardent piety, or he would not have submitted to such a death ; as at this time, it is evident, he was capable of making resistance, and of overcoming his father. The good old man must witness his own son die an unnatural death. To see the death of an *enemy*, even when he reposes on his own pillow, is affecting ; but to attend the deathbed of a *friend*, and that friend a *relative*, and that relative a *child*—a son, cut off in the prime of life, cut off in a way at which humanity shudders, this is painful indeed ! And, to add to the trial, he must inflict this death himself.

We are ready to ask, may not this deed be done by some enemy, who has before imbrued his hands in human blood, and whose heart is steeled against the cry of suffering? May it not be done by some of the heathen, who have not so high a sense of parental duties as himself? Or, at least, may not some of his servants perform the horrid act? Who does not wish to spare the parent the deed? But, no! he is commanded, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him for a burnt offering." Be it remembered too, that it was a most horrid kind of death. He was not to witness his gradual submission to the power of disease; he is not instructed to slay him by administering what should gently undermine his constitution, and by degrees remove him to another world; but he was to slay and "offer him for a burnt offering." It is indescribably affecting to hear, in a time of general distress, a woman saying to her sovereign—"This woman said unto me, Give thy son, that we may eat him to-day, and we will eat my son to-morrow. So we boiled my son, and did eat him. And I said unto her on the next day, Give thy son, that we may eat him." In that case, however, there was a famine, and we can endure almost anything rather than die by the pains of hunger; but in the case before us, Isaac seemed the very blessing that

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Abraham needed, to give value to all his other mercies. And to have the task of slaying this son with a knife, and burning him with fire, was painfully distressing. And, once more, to complete the trial, how could he bear the thought of disclosing it to Sarah? How would she look at him, when she found him to be the executioner of the lovely youth, in whom all their earthly happiness centered? How could he bear to witness her tears, "refusing to be comforted, because her *Isaac* was not;" to hear her bitter reflections upon him, for what she would consider his cruelty towards him? His case was trying indeed!

But Abraham had an enemy to contend with, stronger than nature itself: he had to overcome all the suggestions of unbelief. The present command appeared opposed to the Divine law. When Cain had killed his brother, the blessed God set a mark upon him, manifesting his high disapprobation of the crime, and afterwards ordained, (Gen. ix. 6,) "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." And could it be supposed that this same Being had now called upon a father to slay his son? Besides, man generally seeks a reason for the commands of Heaven, and is usually unwilling to obey, unless he sees the wisdom of the requisition. Moreover, there appeared a direct opposition be-

tween the command and the previous promises of Jehovah : God had promised that he would make of Abraham a great nation ;—that in him should all the families, or nations of the earth be blessed ;—and that these blessings should descend through Isaac, with whom, and his seed, God would establish his covenant. How can these promises comport with the present command ? Do not the ways of the Lord seem unequal ? Does not all the previous faith of Abraham, and his trust in the Divine testimony seem in vain ? Do not the promises of Jehovah appear likely to be broken ? And is not the religion in which, no doubt, Abraham had often gloried before his wicked neighbours, likely to be brought into derision ? The heathen would be ready to ask, Is this the nature of thy religion ? Doth the Deity thou servest call to the perpetration of murder ? Surely no such combination of circumstances ever before met ! At once leading the saint to duty, and tempting him from it.

But mark now the triumph of Abraham's faith. We have often heard of the wonders that faith has achieved ; how it has "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire," &c. ; but we never heard of its effecting a greater conquest than the one now before us.

We have read of an Alexander who conquered the world, but never subdued himself. Here is a hero who, through faith in God, triumphed over his natural dispositions, rose superior to human reason, and discharged the most painful duties in obedience to the Divine command. Faith convinced him, that though the Creator had commanded man not to slay his kind, yet he had, if he pleased, a right to impose it as a duty; that though he had implanted in his soul affections which revolted from this act, yet he could do nothing but what was right; though reason could not unfold the mysterious subject, he felt persuaded that infinite wisdom could; and, therefore, he resolved to trust God where he could not trace him. Let us see how his faith was manifested.

See it in his punctual obedience. Listen to the command, "Take now thy son," &c. One would imagine Abraham ready to say, with a deep-fetched sigh, Well, if I must discharge this most painful of all duties, I will defer it, at least for a little season; perhaps, by my prayers, I may prevail on the blessed God to change his purpose; or I may gradually wean my affections from my beloved Isaac; or at least, by familiarizing the awful scene I must pass through, I may strip it of some of its horrors. Is this the case? No. He "conferred not with flesh and blood."

He delayed not the duty, because it was painful; but "he rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass," and proceeded in search of the awful spot where the event was to take place. Convinced of the power and the love of his heavenly Father, and well knowing that all his designs were founded in infinite wisdom, and would at once promote his own glory and the good of his people, he hastened to the discharge of his duty. Long had he received favours from Heaven; and he could not suppose that he had changed his purposes of mercy towards him. If God demands an Isaac, He first gave him, and he has a right to take him away; "Shall not the Judge of the whole earth do right?" Abraham is satisfied too, that Jehovah could raise Isaac from the dead. His power to do this could never have been denied; but his design of raising the dead had never, that we know of, been revealed. No resurrection had taken place; but Abraham well knew, that though Isaac should die, "the purpose of God should stand, and he would do all his pleasure." The promise was, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called;" and he was persuaded that Omnipotence would fulfil "the promise on which he had caused him to hope." "Accounting," says the Apostle, "that God was able to raise him from the dead, from whence also he received

him in a figure," "He judged him faithful who had promised." See this faith, in his order to his servants, and his conversation with Isaac. To the former he says, "Abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, *and come again to you :*" and to the latter, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering." We cannot think that the lamb here referred to, was Isaac himself, because he would have then said, "God *has* provided a lamb," &c. He no doubt believed, either that the Lord would interpose in some miraculous manner to prevent his death, or rather, perhaps, that he would afterwards restore him to life. Certainly he had a conviction that the Majesty of heaven would approve the obedience he required to his commands; and this alone enabled him to adopt this language. How strikingly do we see in this narrative "the work of faith and labour of love!"

Contemplate now the approbation of the blessed God, as shewn to Abraham. And but for the confidence of his enjoying this, the patriarch could not have braved the trials, or have performed the painful task before us. But possessing this assurance, he is not to be moved by the suggestions of a depraved heart; or even, if he had heard them, the taunts of infidelity; he remains steady to his purpose. To please Jehovah was the great object to which he had devoted his

life. And that he had the Divine approbation, we learn from several facts connected with the narrative. We see it in the gift of strength to enable his faith to conquer. Was Abraham "strong in faith," and disposed to give "glory to God;"—that faith was increased, and that disposition promoted, by Him who is "the giver of every good and perfect gift :—" "He that hath, to him shall be given." Abraham furnishes a proof that, in reference to the man who trusts in the Lord, "as his day so shall his strength be." We sometimes say, that, were we called to this or the other trial, we could not sustain it. Thus do we distrust Him who has graciously declared, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Does not this declaration extend to the most trying circumstances the Christian has to meet with? By indulging in fears of this kind, we destroy our confidence in the blessed God, and render ourselves unequal to bear with suitable feelings what he is pleased to inflict. This approbation was shewn in the acceptance of the offering, and the restoration of Isaac. "He that honoureth me, I will honour," is the rule by which the supreme Governor of the world acts in dealing with his creatures : and here the rule is exemplified. God had intended singular honours for Abraham; but these honours must be preceded by a painful trial; for thus does the Divine Being teach his people to

value his blessings. Abraham obeys the painful command ; but Isaac shall not die. His design is accepted, instead of its execution. The lad is restored to his father ! And, oh ! how must his heart rejoice to receive his son, as it were from the embraces of death ! What scenes would he have to disclose to his beloved Sarah after this marvellous deliverance ! See this approbation in God's providing an offering : thus proclaiming, "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen," that infinite wisdom and mercy will provide a substitute to die for his people, that he will appear for them in the hour of distress, and that he will abundantly reward those that serve him. While Abraham stood, in silent, grateful surprise, marvelling at the miraculous interposition of the great Jehovah in its behalf, he "lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns ; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son." God farther shewed his approbation of his conduct, by renewing and enlarging the covenant he had formerly made with him. While the Most High never blesses disobedience, he rewards those who obey him : "By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son ; that in blessing

I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand upon the sea-shore ; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies : and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou hast obeyed my voice." And see, finally, the approbation of God in holding up the deed to the admiration of all succeeding ages. So long as the volume of Revelation shall endure, "shall this that he hath done be told for a memorial of him." This is the man whom the Majesty of heaven delighteth to honour ; this is the individual he calls upon us to imitate.

It only remains that we hint at the lessons which this most interesting subject suggests to us. It presents us with a type of the death of Christ. It was to this the Saviour referred, when he said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad." But how far does the antetype exceed the type ! Abraham was ready to offer his son ; but "God *spared not* HIS Son, but freely gave him up for us all." Isaac was offered on a mountain ; Christ on the same mountain, or very near it, yielded up his life. The offering up of Isaac brought blessings to Abraham ; the sacrifice of the Saviour opened a channel through which eternal mercies shall flow to man. The narrative farther teaches us,

that our dangers cannot be too great for Him who ruleth in the heavens to deliver us from them. We could hardly have supposed it possible, when Abraham had bound Isaac to the altar, and had already lifted up his hand to strike the fatal blow, that he could have been delivered : but with the God of the Christian all things are possible. Who can harm, when HE protects ? Who will fear, when HE is nigh ? We see that Deity enjoins hard duties, to try his people. "God tempted," or *tried*, Abraham ; not because he was unknown to Omniscience, but to shew us the nature of his religion. In all succeeding ages he ever has, and will visit his people with his severe dispensations, "to try them and prove them ; to see what is in their hearts, and whether they will keep his commandments or no." And finally, the subject illustrates the necessity of faith to our happiness. Had not Abraham possessed faith in the Divine testimony, he had not been happy ; nor could he have thus endured the trials he was called to sustain. He could not have glorified his Creator, nor been thus held up to the admiration of all holy beings. "All men have not faith." This makes the world full of misery. Let us impress deeply on each of our hearts the important injunction of the Saviour, "HAVE FAITH IN GOD."

THE AFFECTING FUNERAL.

GEN. XXIII.

Lapt in the shroud, the earth's cold breast
Shall be thy bed for many a year ;
And not a dream disturb thy rest,
Nor pain provoke a single tear.

Safer than gold in eastern mine,
Safer than gem in ocean's cave,
Thy scatter'd relics shall recline
In the deep coffers of the grave.

There, till the angel trumpet sound,
Ages of silence thou shalt lie ;
Then, from thy earthly cell rebound,
Beauteous in immortality.

EDMESTON.

It is a task pleasing both to the philosopher and the Christian, to turn from the contemplation of the show and glare—the hypocritical pretensions, and but half-disguised insincerity of the present times, to the patriarchal ages, when the manners of men were distinguished for their simplicity and ingenuousness. When we see the sincere affection mankind then manifested to each other, their freedom from everything like empty compliment, their hospitality to strangers, and their whole de-

portment both at home and abroad, we seem to live in another world, and almost wish that our lot had been cast in their day. And when we look at the abundance they possessed, the length of their lives, and the happiness they seem to have enjoyed, we are almost ready on the one hand to envy them their comforts, while on the other, we turn to weep over the human heart, which makes even the improvements of science contribute to the increase of sin, and consequently lessens, in many respects at least, the happiness of man.

But while there were some things peculiar to the patriarchal times, there were others they had in common with us. They experienced their *trials*. Some of these, in the case of Abraham, we have already glanced at ; and have seen that, though in his connexion with Sarah, his beloved wife, he enjoyed much happiness, yet there was something in her temper not very lovely ; a disposition to embrace every opportunity to disturb the peace and harmony of the family ; and something harsh and unkind towards her inferiors. Nor was she a little disposed, when unhappiness occurred in the domestic circle, to throw more blame on her husband than really belonged to him. Added to which, there was about her a strong tendency to disbelieve the promises of God. It was long before she could be brought to place

an implicit reliance on the promises of Jehovah in reference to the great blessings he would bestow on them and their descendants. All these things must be very painful to a man so peaceable and pious as was Abraham; and must materially tend to embitter his days. Of how much importance is it, that those whom a kind Providence has united together in conjugal bonds should study the peace and comfort of each other, and “walk as heirs together of the grace of life, that their prayers be not hindered.”

But notwithstanding that Abraham found in Sarah these imperfections, he loved her with the fondest regard. She was the wife of his youth,—was distinguished for her beauty, and in their old age was the mother of their beloved Isaac. Long had they shared the joys and the sorrows of life together, and talked to each other of the goodness of Jehovah which they had already experienced; while looking forward, the eye of their imaginations delineated the happy scenes that should appear, when the promises which God had made to them, as to the increase of their children, and their happiness as his peculiar people, should be completely fulfilled. And especially must they rejoice in the blessings of the Messiah’s reign, whom they knew was to be reckoned among their descendants: these were indeed causes for gratitude to the God of their mercies.

But great and pure as were the joys of these holy persons, they were not lasting. The greatest beauty must fade, the strongest limbs must decay, and the longest life must end. One hundred and twenty-seven years had Sarah travelled the wilderness of this world; long had she enjoyed the company of an affectionate husband; thirty-seven years had she been the mother of the amiable Isaac; and twelve years had elapsed from the period when he was offered to God, and again restored to his parents a greater blessing than ever; and now the painful separation must take place: she must be torn from her beloved husband, and her affectionate son; she must leave the scenes on which her fond eyes had often gazed with exquisite pleasure, and bid adieu to the world, the pleasures of which, as well as its sorrows, she had long known. This must be the end of mortals. Whatever we are, whatever we possess, however long we may live, it must be said of us, "and they died." Sin has conquered the world, and we must all bow before the "king of terrors," whom that sin has introduced to shew the power of his conquests. In every death that occurs, we trace the Divine anger against transgression, and see cause why, as men, our pride should be humbled, and why, as guilty sinners, we should seek pardon through the mediation of Jesus Christ.

But, besides these, there were other reasons why Sarah should submit to death. She had been taught, by the good Spirit of God, the vanity of all earthly things ; she had been enabled to believe the testimony of Jehovah ; and this faith influenced her conduct for a considerable portion of her life. Hence she is enrolled by Paul on the list of worthies, in the eleventh chapter of his Epistle to the Hebrews, as one of those who received not the accomplishment of the promises, in the advent of the Messiah and the introduction of his dispensation ; “ but saw them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” And thus being weaned from this world, and having her affections placed on another, “ that is, a heavenly,” it was desirable she should be removed to it. The good man, though he lives in this world, considers his home to be in another ; and to that state his steps are directed : to possess its spirit is the object of his present desire, and to glorify its Author his daily aim. Thus he is raised above the pursuits and the enjoyments of earth, and only waits the command of his Father, to remove hence. And though, to be separated from our beloved connexions may be painful, yet it is soon over ; while, if they are united to Christ as well as ourselves, we shall

ere long meet again, to be divided no more. The union between believers in Jesus is one that is lasting ; that death cannot put asunder, but upon which he acts as a friend, removing from them all that divides their affections, and mars their joys, and conducting them to a world where the possibility of a frown, or the least alienation of feeling, shall for ever be utterly unknown.

It has been remarked, that Sarah is the only woman in the sacred writings whose age, death, and burial, are distinctly noted ; and certainly, though not without great faults, she merited an honourable distinction. As the wife of Abraham, and as, in a sense, at the head of the faithful women in Scripture, she is mentioned ; but even this memorial of her is adapted to remind us of our origin and home—the dust.

The death of friends, whom we have long loved and associated with, is a trying event. They were essential to our comfort, and to have them torn from us is to be plunged into sorrow. They leave the world, as to us, a barren waste ; their death proclaims the ravages of sin, while it reminds us of our own mortality, and that we also must go down to the grave. Abraham, therefore, might well “mourn for Sarah, and weep for her.” This was perfectly natural ; we ought to be sensible of our losses ; and while we bless the God who gave us our comforts, he does

not forbid us to mourn when he takes them away. The Saviour himself sanctified grief for the loss of our friends, when he shed the tear of sorrow over the grave of Lazarus. It was fit, then, that Abraham should weep over the corpse of his wife ; it was a tribute due to her virtues ; it was a proof of his sensibility as to her loss ; and it had a tendency to impress both his own heart, and the hearts of those around him, and lead them to reflect on the vanity and uncertainty of the present life.

But while it is lawful to indulge in sorrow when we are visited by bereaving providences, it does not become us to give up ourselves entirely to the influence of grief. There are duties to be discharged both to the dead and the living, which we are inexcusable if we neglect. We should remember the Being who takes away "the desire of our eyes," and be concerned to submit to his will, knowing that he cannot err in his designs or his conduct. Besides which, it becomes us to seek our own comfort in the pursuit of our lawful callings, and the welfare of such of our connexions as the providence of God has still kindly spared to us. In all this we have the example of Abraham, who, though with great sincerity he wept over the corpse of his beloved Sarah, soon remembered he had duties of an important nature to discharge, and rose to fulfil them.

The land of Canaan, in which Al raham and his family had long lived, had, for a series of years, been promised him by the goodness of God ; but his providence had not yet given him possession of enough of it to set his foot upon ; and now that he has lost his beloved wife, he has not a grave in which he can lay her corpse. Rising, then, before the inhabitants of the land, he tells them of his bereavement, reminds them of his being only a stranger in their country, and entreats them to allow him land enough for "a burying place" for his deceased wife, and such of his family who yet remained alive, but who in a few years must all be numbered with the beloved object whose remains he had just left. It is really pleasing to see with what courtesy he addresses them. Religion is not opposed to the polite usages of society, unless indeed they are inconsistent with sincerity ; it rather enjoins upon us the command, "Be courteous," a duty which at once recommends us to the esteem of our fellow men, and tends to shew them that religion makes it possessors amiable.

And while, on the one hand, we admire the simplicity and the courtesy of Abraham ; so, on the other, we are pleased with the conduct of the children of Heth towards him. They appear to have sympathized with him in his trial ; they

justly considered him a favourite of Heaven, and very handsomely offered him the choice of their tombs, declaring that no man would withhold his sepulchre from him. It looks well when those who have no just sense of religion pay respect to those who have ; and it excites our hope, that as they have begun to discover their personal worth, they may in time ascertain what it is that makes Christians superior to themselves.

The religion of Abraham had given him correct views of justice ; and as he was a rich man, he very properly declined the offer of the sons of Heth. Farther than this, he knew that the dispositions of men were liable to change, and that the very persons who now offered him a burying place, might, in a little time, disturb the bones of her whom he so tenderly loved, or place by her side their own friends, whom in life she did not know, or whose crimes had excited her abhorrence. Added to which, the good old man wished his whole family to be finally interred in the same tomb ; that, as they were united in life, so they might be in death ; and in the morning of the resurrection, when their bodies burst from the grave, their eyes might first mutually fix on each other, and renew at once the intercourse they held on earth. Besides all this, the land of Canaan had, by promise, been given

to him, and he wished in this way to take possession of it. The bones of Sarah became a deposit; from this time he would look on it as his home, and indulge the most confident assurance that his seed should possess the whole country.

Influenced by these views, he entreated the inhabitants of Hebron to use their influence with Ephron, to sell him a field in Machpelah, of which he was the owner, and which had in it a cave suitable for a family vault. Though Abraham was a rich man, and enjoyed the good will of his neighbours, yet, being comparatively a stranger, he does not presume on possessing influence himself, but begs the kind offices of his neighbours. In this way did he manifest his humility. Ephron, immediately, very handsomely makes him an offer of the field as a token of his friendship; but, for the reasons we have already assigned, Abraham declined its acceptance, and paid him down the sum at which he estimated its value—about fifty pounds of our money.

Let us pause here, to indulge in one or two reflections.—The first land that Abraham bought was not to build houses upon, or to convert into vineyards, but to afford him a burying place. He painfully felt the fact of human mortality; and remembering that he was but dust, he shewed a concern, first of all, to provide his last home. The Jews frequently had their sepulchres pre-

pared long before their deaths, to remind them of their mortality. Joseph of Arimathea had his tomb in his garden, to moderate his delights with the thoughts of his end. The Egyptians had a death's head carried about the table at their feasts ; and a stonemason waited on the emperors of Constantinople, on the day of their coronation, with a choice of tombstones. And so Abraham, on this occasion, as death had begun his inroads on his family, would make provision of a burying place for them all ; as they had lived together on earth, so he would have them lie together after death, "Sepulchres," an old divine has remarked, "are symbols of the communion of saints, and of the resurrection of the dead ; hence the Hebrews called burying grounds *the houses of the living.*" The living and the dead are united, and will before long meet together in one place.

Another remark, not unworthy of notice, is, that the first time we read of money is in connexion with the purchase of a grave ; as though the Spirit of God would teach us the folly of those who make gold their god, and place their affections on what will purchase a tomb, rather than the blessings and enjoyments of life. The man who seeks to be rich may ensure a magnificent mausoleum, but his money cannot purchase his exemption from the evils of the pre-

sent life, or ensure him the enjoyment of the Divine favour after death. These must be obtained from a world where the coin of the present state does not pass current. The favour of God may be enjoyed by the poorest among men, by the exercise of faith in the revelation he has given of his Son; this alone will bring us to the enjoyment of the friendship of our Maker on earth, or introduce us to the joys of heaven hereafter. And though we possessed the wealth of the Indies, without an interest in the Mediator, we should, as to all permanent blessings, be poor indeed.

Having paid down the value of the land, Abraham was anxious to have it secured to him. The body he was about to lay there, he reckoned of great value, and he could not bear the idea of its removal; besides which, though he was content to wander about while he lived, he wished when he died that his body might "rest in hope," that he might lie among his connexions, and be laid in the land that his descendants should long continue to inhabit. The desire of his heart was granted, "and the field and the cave that is therein were made sure unto Abraham, for a possession of a burying place, by the sons of Heth."

These preliminaries being all settled, the ven-

erable patriarch buried his beloved Sarah. The very object on which he once delighted to look had now become offensive to his senses, and must be buried out of his sight. Dust we are, and to dust we must return. Who does not, as she falls into the grave, drop the tear of sympathy and grief over such a corpse? She leaves her family in the midst of their fairest prospects, and "her sons come to honour, but she seeth it not." However we may be distinguished for our beauty and activity, however eminent for our bodily strength, or our mental powers, we must go down to the grave and become food for worms. It must be said of us, as Pope said of a deceased lady,

How lov'd, how valued once, avails thee not,
To whom related, or by whom begot;
A heap of dust alone remains of thee,
'Tis all thou art, and all the proud must be.

And though we may appear essential to the happiness of our connexions, and throw a lustre over general society,—though by our property we may feed the poor, or by our talents contribute to the welfare of a kingdom, or render important services to the church of God,—all will be of no avail when death receives his commission to summon us hence. The tear of regret

may fall from many an eye, but the affairs of our families and of general society will soon move on as though we had never been. Death makes the most cruel separations, and tears us from our dearest connexions, while he calls on those who once worshipped us as their idols to look on our remains with disgust, and say to their neighbours, "give me possession of a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight."

But while we take a view of the subject so eminently calculated to mortify our pride, and to wean us from an undue attachment to the present world, we should not forget that the body of Sarah was laid here in the firm persuasion that the whole land, of which Abraham thus took possession, should be occupied by her descendants ; and, however melancholy the commencement of their entering upon it, should make them happy ; for here God would be worshipped, and his people blest. There is a still more pleasing view that we may take of the tomb, when it is occupied by a believer in the Son of God. In such a case, the grave is made the means of purifying the body from the defilement of sin ; the precious dust is watched over by the adorable Redeemer, who at the last day shall not merely raise it from the grave, for this shall be

the lot of men universally, but shall bring his people from the dust, and confer upon them, as bearing his own image, immortal glory. While they shall be for ever secured from death, they shall enjoy all that can make their existence infinitely happy. At that day Abraham and Sarah shall burst from their tomb, and experience happiness unspeakably superior to any they knew on earth, in the presence of their God and Saviour, and that for an eternal period.

Having buried his beloved Sarah, the venerable patriarch began to set his house in order, and to prepare for the great change that he himself must undergo. One of the strongest ties which bound him to earth had been cut asunder ; while heaven now possessed an additional attraction. He felt himself still united in heart to the beloved object who had been torn from his embraces, and could enter into the sentiment that has been well expressed by a modern poet,

“ Hearts in the holy bands of love combin’d
Death has no power to sever. Thou art mine !
A little whi’e, and thou shalt dwell with me
In scenes where sorrow is not. Cheerily
Tread thou the path that leads thee to the grave ;
Rough though it be, and painful ; for the GRAVE
Is but the threshold of ETERNITY.”

But while he looked forward to the happy pe-

riod when he should be re-united to Sarah, he was concerned, in the meantime, to discharge the duties that God had commanded him. He probably breathed the spirit of another of the patriarchs, possibly his contemporary, when he said, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come."

Let us rise from the consideration of this subject deeply impressed with the vanity and mutability of all earthly good; and remembering that, however lovely and engaging our companions may be, we must soon be separated from them by death. Let us learn the folly of placing our affections on worldly riches; seeing that even if they do not "take to themselves wings and fly away," they will not ward off death, nor furnish us, after it, with a better residence than the grave. Let us rejoice that the intimate and delightful connexion between the people of God does not end with the present life, but is renewed, and that for ever, in the world of eternal glory, where they shall be drawn closer together in the bands of the purest affection and joy. And let it be our anxious concern to enjoy the favour of Christ, which shall enable us to smile at the last enemy, to descend to the grave with a calm serenity, and to rise with unutterable joy, to the realms of immortal life, "and so shall we be ever with the Lord."

THE PATRIARCHAL WEDDING.

GEN. XXIV.

Across the road a seraph flew :
‘ Mark,’ said he, ‘ that happy pair ;
Marriage helps devotion there.
When kindred minds their God pursue,
They break with double vigour, through
The dull incumbent air.’

WATTS.

IN reading the page of history, who has not been struck with the rapid and numerous changes in the life of man? Here we see an individual in his boyish years ; he rapidly hastens to manhood, and sets sail on the ocean of life, filled with expectations of happiness from the world : but alas ! at the period when he expected full possession of enjoyment, misfortunes pursue him, or death enters his dwelling, and snatches from his arms some of his dearest connexions ; and, before he can recover from the effects of this disappointment, he feels the infirmities of age oppress him, and sees death on his rapid

march towards him. He lays himself on his dying pillow, and while, if a believer in the truths of divine revelation, and one who has been enabled by divine grace to flee to Christ for happiness, he is willing to depart hence, he wishes to guard his children against the evils he has observed in the world, into many of which he has himself fallen ; and to lead them to the paths of virtue and happiness.

Every reader will perceive the application of these remarks to "the Father of the Faithful." One hundred and forty years had the pious Abraham trod the wilderness of the world ; and trials, numerous, complicated, and heavy had been his lot. But the goodness of God had, notwithstanding, blessed him with great favours. He enjoyed a large portion of this world's happiness ; Jehovah had given him a beloved Isaac, had delivered him from death, and had connected with his deliverance promises the most interesting and important. But he had lost his affectionate Sarah, and was at present, as he apprehended, near to an eternal world. The anxious feelings of a parent for the happiness of his son, arose in his heart. Isaac was forty years old, but had not taken to himself a wife. It is probable that his affection towards his parents was great, and he was, therefore, unwilling to be

separated from them ; he feared Jehovah, and he saw none around him possessed of “like precious faith,” with whom he could form so close a connexion ; besides which, he considered himself at the disposal of his father, in whose wisdom and prudence he placed the most unlimited confidence. Abraham, who was every way worthy of such a son, felt anxious, both that Isaac should marry, and that the object of his best earthly regard should not be an idolater, with whom they were entirely surrounded. There can be no doubt that the affair had long been with him a matter of deliberation and prayer ; but the manner in which God would bring about the marriage had not been disclosed to him till now.

A pious, disinterested, faithful, and affectionate servant is an acquisition of inestimable value. Such an one had Abraham in the person of Eliezer, who was born in his house, and resided with him more than fifty years, and in whose hands Abraham had entrusted the management of many of his domestic affairs ; “for all the goods of his master were in his hands.” This man was once the heir apparent of Abraham’s property ; but though God had disappointed his expectations on that head, he had not relaxed in his attention to his master’s interest, but, fearing Jehovah, and

loving Abraham his master, continued anxiously to seek the welfare of his family.

The venerable patriarch called this tried and faithful servant, and entrusted him with the important business of going to the land of Mesopotamia, and seeking, from among his kindred, a wife for his son Isaac. We hardly know which to admire most in this transaction ;—the careful solicitude of Abraham, that his son might be preserved from idolatry ; his wisdom in entrusting the commission to Eliezer, and the solemn manner in which the transaction was performed ;—or the willingness of the servant to undertake the journey ; the commendable caution he shewed, in entering into an engagement of so solemn a nature as to be connected with an oath, or the anxiety he shewed to fulfil the wishes of his master.

Having made the preparations which a journey of so much importance required, he set out, accompanied, no doubt, with many an ardent prayer that the God of Abraham would guide him. We see here the manner in which this important matter of marriage should be proceeded in,—with much caution and prayer. We cannot expect happiness unless we watch the leadings of divine Providence, and follow where he leads us. Perhaps if the fact could be ascertained, we should

find that very few persons are unhappy in the marriage state, who enter upon it in the fear of God, having first sought his wisdom to direct them in their choice, and made, like Isaac, true religion an essential qualification in the character of their partners.

See, then, Eliezer pursuing the wearisome journey, of four hundred and sixty miles, over ground that perhaps had hardly been travelled before. He goes on an important errand, and is concerned suitably to discharge the duties which devolve upon him. His young master could not marry among his neighbours, because, as idolaters, they were under the curse of God ; and though the family to which he was travelling, the descendants of Shem, were partially the votaries of idolatry, yet did they possess the knowledge of the true God, whom they worshipped ; on which account he was far more likely to meet with genuine religion among them.

Arrived without the city of Nahor, Eliezer stopped ; and, knowing that "the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord," he looked to Heaven for help. Now, indeed, was the time he needed Divine direction, and now, as at all times, was the Supreme Being ready to afford it. Anxious that his way might appear to him quite clear, he prayed that God in his providence

would send the damsel whom he had appointed for his master Isaac to the well ; and that when he requested water of her, she should draw both for him and his camels. It is not wise in us to dictate to the blessed God in what way he shall answer our prayers ; this, in us, who have a clearer revelation from Heaven than Eliezer had, would be presumption : but as in this case the petition flowed from the purest motives, and was not opposed to the revelation Jehovah had then given of himself, he was pleased to answer the good man in his own way ; who, finding that his prayer was regarded, was filled with astonishment. Perhaps the littleness of his faith had hardly led him to expect an answer ; or probably, when he received the answer he expected, he was filled with surprise, that the Most High would listen to the prayers of one so unworthy. It is a fact not a little remarkable, and which tends to confirm the doctrine of human depravity, that even the best of men—those who believe that God is willing to fulfil their requests—look so little for those answers, and express so much astonishment when they receive them. Surely this is a proof of the weakness of their faith in the Divine promises, and ought to be a motive for the deepest humiliation before the Lord.

One cannot dwell on the events of the patri-

archal age without being delighted with the simplicity that characterized their manners. We have admired the conduct of Isaac, who referred even the business of his marriage to his father ; and here we are led to mark the same simple and lovely conduct in the character of Rebekah. Women, even in the highest ranks of life, were not then above the discharge of domestic business. The wife of the monarch would “seek wool and flax, and work willingly with her hands,” and the daughter of the wealthiest man would water the cattle, and carry home the vessel filled with water for culinary purposes. And who sees not in all this, manners more truly respectable than those of the present day, when the time of a female is consumed at the toilet, in frivolous pleasures, or in retailing the tales of scandal ?

While Eliezer was addressing his God in prayer, the lovely, industrious, and courteous Rebekah came, with her pitcher upon her shoulder, to the well, and filled it with water. Struck with this speedy answer to his petitions,—with the beauty of her person, for—

Her form was fresher than the morning rose
When the dew wets its leaves,—

and feeling the effect of heat and thirst, he solicited a little water from her, that he might drink.

Her heart overflowing with benevolence to the needy, in the spirit of genuine politeness, leads her readily to accede to his request ; and, feeling the kind sympathies of humanity, she proposes also to draw water for his camels ; which, without waiting for his answer, she hastens to do ; thus shewing her industry, as well as her courtesy.

All this is viewed by the good man with astonishment ; and he at length concluded that God had prospered his journey. He proceeded to give Rebekah proofs of his regard to her, by presenting her with handsome gifts, the custom of that, and indeed, more or less, of every age and country. He inquired who she was, and whether her father could furnish him and his attendants with accommodations for a short period ? She readily gave him her own name, and that of her parents, and assured him of a welcome reception at her father's house. Ah ! thou lovely female ! little dost thou think of the designs of Providence ; thou knowest not that thy name and conduct shall be immortalized on the page of inspiration ; and that events the most important are suspended on thy present conduct. It is not for us to know the designs of Heaven. The greatest affairs often depend on the most trifling events. A word, or even a look, has frequently led to very surpris-

ing occurrences. Thus was it here : Rebekah's kindness convinced Eliezer that she was intended to be the wife of Isaac ; and having with joy and gratitude lifted up his heart to the Giver of his mercies, who had hitherto prospered him, he proceeded towards the house of Bethuel, the damsel's father. How unlike the conduct of Eliezer to that of many persons, who can receive unnumbered mercies at the hands of Jehovah without a single expression, or indeed a single feeling of gratitude to him. Such persons give awful proof that they are far from God, and that he "is not in all their thoughts."

Rebekah, filled with joy and surprise at an interview so singular, had ran forward, and told the family the particulars of her meeting with the stranger ; this induced her brother Laban, on whom appears to have devolved much of the management of the family affairs, probably through the infirmities, or perhaps death of the aged father, to run to meet him, and to offer him a hearty welcome to their house. When he had entered, all were anxious to perform the kindest offices ; being influenced, possibly, not only by feelings of respect to the stranger, or by the laws of hospitality, but by the hope of sharing his riches, as Rebekah had done before them.

Arrived at the house of Bethuel, they placed

before Eliczer the food he required to recruit his strength. But the good man was too sensible of the importance of his errand, too much filled with astonishment at the movements of Divine Providence, and, probably, too desirous to gratify the curiosity he had excited in their bosoms, to eat or drink, till he had told them his business. And in what a simple and yet eloquent manner does he deliver his tale ! He tells them his own station as "Abraham's servant," but does not once hint at the office he filled as his steward, or the confidence his master reposed in him. He informs them how God has blessed his master, and made him rich ;—that he has a beloved son by his favourite Sarah, yet unmarried, but for whom he is anxious to obtain a suitable wife ; and that for the purpose of seeking such an one, he has now left home. In a strain of simple piety, he relates his prayer and its accomplishment at the well, states his conviction that Rebekah is the woman designed by Jehovah for Isaac's companion, and asks them for their reply to his statement and request. How straightforward and honest is all this ! and who can forbear regretting that this simplicity does not now distinguish our conduct, and prevail in the ranks of fashionable society ? "How sweet," remarks Mr. Fuller, "would all our temporal affairs be rendered, if they were thus inter-

mixed with godliness." Instead of this, luxury and sin have introduced refinements which put morality and nature to the blush.

To a statement like that of Eliezer, but one reply could be given,—“*The hand of the Lord is in it.*” The whole family saw that Isaac and his father were not influenced by worldly policy, but concerned to follow the leadings of infinite wisdom in a concern of so much moment ; and if true piety existed among them at all, they would rejoice in the good providence of God in selecting for Rebekah such a husband, and placing her in a family where she would be free from temptations to idolatry. They consented to the union ; and the pious servant again worshipped Jehovah, who had granted his desires and prospered his journey.

The business being so far settled, Eliezer ate and drank, and distributed presents to the whole family, who indulged in the cheerfulness suitable to the occasion. Rising on the following morning, the faithful servant requested that they might depart. Having fulfilled the object of his journey, he was unwilling to waste even a day, but to return to the business that needed his attention at home. But here the family found themselves involved in a considerable difficulty. Rebekah had never been from home ; she had a

warm place in their affections, and they could not bear the idea of parting with her ; they wished therefore to prevent her, for a season, from going. But Eliezer, seeing the Lord had prospered him, aware that a separation would never be less painful, and unwilling to withhold the news of his success from his master an hour longer than was necessary, would not delay their departure. At length the question was wisely referred for decision to Rebekah ; who, recognising the hand of God in the whole affair, and anxious to see those of whom she had heard so much, as well as looking forward, no doubt, in the expectation of happiness, said, without hesitation, "I will go." An affectionate parting, attended with mutual prayers and good wishes, took place, and Rebekah, throwing herself on the care of Providence, set out on her journey to the land of Canaan.

Isaac was a man eminently devoted to God ; he loved to trace his hand in his works. On one evening during the absence of Eliezer, he walked out in the fields. Perhaps he went to contemplate the beauties of creation, and to rise from them to the Being who made them ; perhaps he was desirous, apart from society, to hold intercourse with his God and Father, or perhaps he wished seriously to reflect on the responsibility and the duties that would devolve on him when

he entered into the connexion to which he was looking forward ; nor is it improbable that he might indulge some hopes of seeing the return of a party in whose business he was so deeply interested. While thus walking, the eye of Rebekah caught the sight of Isaac ; and when on inquiry she found who he was, she alighted from her camel, and covered herself with a veil ; and in this manner, expressive of her modesty and subjection, she was introduced to Isaac. The good man having heard from his servant the whole narrative of events, saw the kind hand of Jehovah in the whole arrangement, and took Rebekah for his wife. She enjoyed his undivided affection till death separated them, for he never stained his life by indulging in the sin of polygamy.

It is worthy of remark, that in this narrative, as well as in the other instances of marriage recorded in the inspired volume, no mention is made of the observance of any religious ceremony. They neither went up to the temple, offered a sacrifice, or had the presence of a priest. Marriage with them was regarded as a civil contract ; but we cannot suppose that on so important an occasion as this they would neglect the important duty of praying for the blessing of Him who can alone make his creatures happy.

We have seen the simple manner in which

the conjugal state was entered upon in the primitive ages ; and we must rejoice, that as Isaac and Rebekah were thus clearly brought together by the hand of God, so he continued through life to bless them, and to crown their union with a larger portion of happiness than usually falls to the lot of mortals.

Let us learn from the whole to watch the leadings of Divine Providence in all our ways, and never to seem to run before it. In all our circumstances let us commend our affairs to God by fervent prayer, and then expect his gracious answer to our requests. Before young persons enter on a state so momentous as that of marriage, let them consult the wise and the good, whose greater knowledge of the world, and experience, qualify them to give counsel. And in all things let us seek "the wisdom that cometh from above," remembering that interesting command and promise of holy writ, "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

THE DUTIFUL SON .

GEN. XXXVII.—L.

Joseph ! ‘ my Son !—Thou God of heaven !

Restore the prop of sinking age !

Or, if that hope no more is giv’n,

O, yield his murderer to my rage.’

AMONG the innumerable illustrations of the Divine goodness with which we are furnished by his works of creation and providence, there are few more interesting, or that contribute more to the happiness of man, than the institution of society. Were every man to be left to himself, he could not possibly be so happy as he now is. Our Creator has, therefore, implanted in our hearts affections of a sympathetic kind, which lead us to feel a lively interest in the welfare of others; and this anxiety exists, or ought to do so, in proportion as they are nearly or more remotely allied to us in nature. Hence, the parent and the child, with a solicitude that knows no

bounds, seek each other's enjoyment ; and those of the same family mutually share their sorrows and their joys, lightening the burden of the one, and adding greatly to the relish of the other.

In consequence, however, of the disobedience of man to the commands of God, which has thrown the universe into disorder, and perverted the passions of our nature, we are sometimes compelled to mourn over improper feelings shewn by the different branches of families, creating domestic feuds, and tending to destroy the affectionate regard which ought to display itself in every movement. And, surely, no scene can be more unlovely than that of discord and animosity reigning where harmony and love ought to have an undisputed dominion. But over such scenes we have often wept, while we have been desirous for the spread of Divine truth, which can alone subdue the improper feelings of man, and attune, in sweetest harmony, the kind and tender sensibilities of the soul—which shall make the lion and the lamb lie down together, and infuse the mild and gentle spirit of the child into every bosom. Such blessings the gospel can impart, and over such scenes the whole world shall ultimately rejoice.

Scarcely any part of the inspired volume has been read with so much interest as the history of

Joseph. It is a moral painting, on which the man of taste and the ignorant rustic may gaze with equal admiration—a narrative which displays human nature in its best and its worst dress; and that shews the grace of God influencing the heart, and teaching it how to act in circumstances the most trying;—a history which strikingly illustrates the providence of God, as guiding all human affairs to promote the happiness of his people—exhibits him as allowing the wicked to prosper for a time in their designs, while it demonstrates the infinite importance of being numbered with those who enjoy the Divine favour. It is a relation of events to which the child listens with wonder, and on which he may dwell with increasing admiration even to old age.

Many attempts have been made, in different ages and nations, to illustrate the principal events contained in the narrative, and to exhibit its most striking beauties. But we may almost as well attempt to add new glories to the sun, or to clothe nature in a more lovely green, as to make the tale more interesting than it appears in the artless language of the inspired writer. Time, who robs language of its excellence by the improvements he confers on science, has not stolen one of its beauties, but left it to impress our minds with all its native grandeur. Hence, every such at-

tempt has failed, and it continues to bid defiance to man, however gifted and learned, to produce a story that shall so closely entwine around every heart.

My reader will begin to suspect that I am about to act inconsistently with these sentiments, in attempting an illustration of the history. Let me beg, then, to declare in the outset, that I disclaim all idea of adding fresh beauty to the story, or of deepening the interest which a careful perusal of it in the sacred volume would excite. Its excellences appear to every eye, and its lessons are offered to every understanding. The object I have in view, is merely to divide the story into parcels;—to exhibit the character of Joseph in several points of view, and to hold him up as an example to different classes of persons. And should any one, by reading the remarks I have to offer on his character, be inclined to discharge the duties he owes to his family and society in a way more accordant with the commands of God, and the example of this amiable individual, I shall consider myself amply repaid.

It is impossible to reflect on the character of Joseph in the view in which I would now introduce him—as the *Dutiful Son*, without thinking of the affecting circumstances in which he was placed, even in early life. He was the son

of the beloved Rachel, the distinguished favourite, and the only proper wife of his father. In early childhood he was deprived of all the tender anxieties, and all the unspeakable advantages of her maternal care. He was, it is true, the favourite of his father; but, alas! he was also exposed to the envy of his brethren, and to the snares of a wicked world; he was destitute of the affectionate counsels of a mother, whose solicitude frequently preserves the young from evils from which even the stronger arm and the greater authority of a father cannot save them.

Jacob, though an affectionate parent, and concerned for the happiness of all his children, does not appear to have been eminently distinguished for his prudence. As Joseph was the son of his old age, being born when he was upwards of ninety years old, and the child of his beloved Rachel—possessed too of an amiable temper and of ardent piety—and, as his years increased, furnished constant and new proofs of the highest excellence, Jacob marked the favourite son by clothing him with a garment different in its colours, and probably in its form, from those of his brethren. It is true, the good conduct of Joseph might deserve this, but the worthy old man should have seen the impropriety of thus placing him in danger of the envy of his brethren,

and exciting in his own bosom feelings exceedingly unfavourable to his humility. In the management of our children, we should consult our judgment much more than our affections.

As Joseph seems but seldom to have left his fond father, to mingle with the world, we are not surprised at his indulgence of a childish simplicity, and of his want of that prudence which experience alone can impart. His pious soul grieved over his brethren's improprieties ; and, perhaps somewhat imprudently, he told them to his father ;—the openness of his disposition led him to divulge before these brethren some dreams he had dreamt, which seemed to promise his future exaltation and honour, which only tended to excite their envy. His father, though he rebuked him, lest he should indulge in pride, yet “observed the saying ;” he saw something of its probable meaning ; and, no doubt, would love Joseph so much the better on account of what he believed God would do for him.

Whatever ideas this lovely youth might be led to entertain of future greatness, they did not prevent the discharge of the duties which his father required of him. His brethren were employed in tending their flocks at *Shechem*, now called *Naplouse*, a distance of about sixty miles from the residence of Jacob, who, both because he

possessed all the anxieties of a parent, and knew they were exposed to dangers from the men of Shechem, whom, on a former occasion, they had grievously offended, requested Joseph to pay them a visit and inquire after their welfare. Ever ready to obey the wishes of his father, he hastened to the place, and not finding them there, he went on to Dothan, a distance of eight miles farther. Thus did he manifest at once his affection towards his brethren, and his regard to his father's commands. With what anxious solicitude would Jacob seem to follow his son, and how desirous would he be for the return of one in whose happiness he felt so deeply interested, and whose conversation gave him so much pleasure.

It often happens that when we estimate our mercies too highly, and place them in the stead of their Giver, they are removed from us till we are effectually taught our dependence upon God. Thus was it in the case of Joseph. His father had manifested towards him an undue partiality; this at once called forth the malevolent feelings of his brethren and the displeasure of the blessed God; who to chastise his servant for his impropriety, and to accomplish the future designs of his mercy towards the family, allowed his breth-

ren to gratify their wicked dispositions by selling him as a slave into Egypt.

When a representation was made to good old Jacob, which induced him to believe that Joseph had been torn in pieces by wild beasts, with what grief would he contemplate the death of such a son! Little did he imagine that he was yet alive, and a slave in a strange land! And as little did he suppose that the prayers of his beloved son ascended from day to day on his behalf, to the throne of Divine mercy! Never once did he think that more than twenty years hence he should see his beloved Joseph in the flesh, and again hold the most delightful intercourse with him. How is the future hid from our view! and how ignorant are we of

“What gloomy lines are writ for us,
Or what bright scenes may rise.”

It appears to us very extraordinary that Joseph, who entertained towards his father such an affectionate regard, should remain twenty years in Egypt without sending to make inquiry after him. But there are some things, which, if considered, will tend to remove our surprise. Let it then be remembered, that in those early days there were but few opportunities afforded for communication between one country and another. Years might revolve, and Joseph might

not know of a single person going to Canaan ; besides which, he was for many years a slave, and after that a prisoner, and he might rather wish to suffer what he did, and be considered dead, than send intelligence which must reflect severely on his brethren, and rob his father of happiness. It is true that he was, after this, elevated to high dignity in the government of Egypt, and we might have supposed that he would have been desirous to inform his father of so gratifying a circumstance ; but we must remember that even this could not be done without blame resting on those by whose means he was sent from home ; and, in addition to all that has been said, we must consider his movements to have been under the direction of a wise and gracious Being, who saw fit to carry on his plans without the knowledge of Jacob. It is impossible to view the conduct of Joseph towards his father, both in his early life and in after-days, and suppose that this omission sprung from indifference, or the want of affection towards his venerable parent.

At length the period arrived when Joseph should see most of his brethren, hear of the welfare of his father, and see events which, governed by the hand of God, should ultimately bring them together. Famine, the scourge

which so often visited the world in its early ages, overspread the land of Canaan ; and it became necessary that a supply of corn should be obtained from Egypt for the support of Jacob and his family. The venerable man commanded his ten eldest sons to go down to that country, with money in their hands, and buy what they so much needed. Who could have imagined the scenes that were to be exhibited before they returned ? Not one of them expected that Joseph was alive, much less that he was the governor of Egypt ;—they imagined not that they were going to pay homage to him ; that they would be treated as spies, and involved in difficulty ; or that the sin which twenty years ago they had committed against their amiable brother, would now be brought before them, in all its horror, by their terrified consciences.

Arrived in the land of Egypt, they had to make their appearance before its governor. It is probable that foreigners had to contract with him in person, as by this means he could most effectually learn the condition of the countries in which they resided ; besides which he might hope that in this way he should at some time or other have an interview with his brethren. No sooner did they enter his presence than he recognised in their countenances the family features : they did

not imagine that, bowing to the governor of Egypt, they were fulfilling the dream of their brother ; but he could not fail to be impressed with the fact. They had no knowledge of him, for twenty years had made a considerable alteration in his person ; he spoke the language of Egypt, and was surrounded with the pomp of a court ; it was therefore no wonder, that, notwithstanding all the extraordinary circumstances which subsequently occurred, they did not know him. He charged them with being spies, and detained them, evidently with the view of eliciting from them all the information he could obtain in reference to his father, Benjamin, and the whole family. He, notwithstanding his apparent harshness, shews kindness to them, and while he furnishes them with provisions for their future necessities, orders their money to be again placed in their sacks.

It is true that, by detaining Simeon in bonds, and demanding a sight of Benjamin before he would release him or grant them a future supply of corn, he is adding to the sorrow of his father ; but for this, as we shall see hereafter, he had important reasons. At the same time, a fine opportunity was afforded to the venerable patriarch, to exercise resignation to the painful dispensations of Providence, and a foundation was being laid for his future happiness and gratitude.

After the expiration of a few months, it became necessary for the sons of Jacob again to go down to Egypt to purchase food. It is affecting to see the anxiety the worthy old man feels at the idea of parting with his beloved Benjamin ; and impossible not to admire his piety and resignation as he consents to his journey : " And God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin ; if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved !" We see them hastening to Egypt ; they travel with sentiments of pleasure, not supposing events will occur before their return which shall fill them with the deepest anxiety, and ultimately afford them the highest happiness.

It is exceedingly interesting to be present, in imagination, at the affecting interview which took place, when the sons of Jacob were presented, with their gifts, to the governor of Egypt. " And he asked them of their welfare, and said, Is your father well ?—the old man of whom ye spake, is he yet alive ?" And they answered, " Thy servant our father is in good health ; he is yet alive." This was what Joseph wanted to know, and the information gave him a pleasure of which they could at present form no idea.

When Judah, under the persuasion that the

governor entertained an opinion of them unfavourable to their honesty, delivered an oration, with a view of saving Benjamin from prison, which touched every fine feeling of the soul, and which has been the admiration of every age, with what feelings must Joseph listen ! As he spoke of the grief that the absence of Benjamin must give to the good old man his father, how must it harrow up the sensibilities of Joseph, and lead him to rejoice that his father now possessed the love of his children !

We must not at present describe the scene that exhibited itself when Joseph made himself known to his brethren, excepting so far as it relates to the inquiry, "Doth my father yet live ?" The fact he knew before ; but the question includes in it feelings of love, of thankfulness, and of solicitude for his happiness, that could not be so well expressed in any other words, at least not in so short a sentence.

When the anxiety and confusion necessarily attendant on the discovery of himself to his brethren is over, how affectionate is the message he sends to his father ! Having been absent from him more than twenty years, we cannot be surprised at his wishing to see him. Nor will it be enough for him merely to pay a visit to his son ; but he must take up his residence in Egypt.

Though the providence of God has exalted Joseph, he is not ashamed of his father, nor backward to acknowledge him, even though he be but a shepherd, and therefore held by the Egyptians in contempt.

How many instances has the pen of history recorded in which young persons, when they have risen in society, have allowed their parents still to struggle in adversity, and even permitted them to depend upon the bestowments of charity for their bread. How ungrateful the conduct of such children ! How do they expose themselves to the frown of Jehovah, and the disesteem of the good ; while in many cases their conduct to their parents lays the foundation of their own ruin. Filial affection reigns in the heart of Joseph, and he will provide for his father the necessities of life, as long as he may be spared a sojourner on earth. Such an example is every way worthy of the imitation of my juvenile readers. "Honour thy father, and thy mother, for this is the first commandment with promise."

What must have been the feelings of the venerable Jacob when he found that his son Joseph was yet alive ! No wonder that it overpowered him, and that he fainted at the intelligence. With what pleasure did he prepare for his journey to go down and see him, and what would be

his gratitude, when he found that such a determination was in perfect accordance with the will of God ! And what a meeting did they have ! Who can contemplate it without a tear ? “ And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father to Goshen, and presented himself unto him, and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. And Israel said unto Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive.”

The affection which Joseph shewed to his father on this occasion was not a sudden ebullition of feeling, that soon evaporated. It continued, and led him to make a permanent provision for the comfort of his aged parent for the seventeen years he had yet to live.

It is easy to trace the partiality of Jacob towards his beloved Joseph, in the oath he required of him in preference to his other sons, that he should be carried after death to the land of his fathers, as also in the blessing he pronounced on him and his children on his dying pillow.

As the affection of Joseph towards his father continued till death called them to separate, so it led him to weep in bitterness over his dead body. He was deeply afflicted to lose one whose example, counsel, and prayers had rendered him most essential service. That grief, however, would be

moderated by the delightful expectation of meeting him in a state where separation shall be unknown.

Having thus maintained the character of a dutiful son through the life of his father, Joseph could shew but one farther proof of affection, and that was to bury the good old man with circumstances of honour. This was done ; and some remarks connected with this deeply interesting event will be found in a subsequent part of this volume, under the title of “ *The Dying Patriarch.*”

It appears impossible to study the history of Joseph without seeing the incalculable value of genuine piety, especially to young persons. While it supports the mind under trials, it raises its possessor in the rank of moral worth. We see farther the loveliness of rendering due honour and respect to our parents. So much importance did the righteous Governor of the world attach to this duty under the Levitical economy, as to reward its observance with long life, and to punish those who broke it with death by stoning. Let young persons aspire after the honour of belonging to the family of God, and then they may look forward to the happy period when they shall meet their believing relatives in a state where there is neither sorrow nor separation. Wilt thou not, my young reader, from this time cry unto

Jehovah, *My Father, thou art the guide of my youth!* Such a surrender of the heart and the conduct to the government of God, not merely brings us into a closer and indissoluble union with our pious friends, but prepares us for all the duties and the trials of life, and ultimately conducts us to the mansions of eternal glory, where Jehovah, as the father of his people, ever enriches them with the choicest proofs of his unchangeable regard.

THE AFFECTIONATE BROTHER.

GEN. XXXVII.—L.

And is it thus a brother hails
A brother's fond remembrance here ?
If thus affection's strength prevails,
What may we not expect from fear ?

It is exceedingly common for us to imagine that "the former times were better than the present." This feeling in many cases arises from a disposition to murmur against Divine Providence, or to find matter of complaint against our fellow-creatures. But when all needful allowance is made for improper tendencies of this sort, it must be admitted that the earlier ages of time presented scenes of a moral kind far more lovely than we can now view. Poets and painters have invested the circumstances of a country life in colours so fascinating and gay, that the citizen is almost tempted to resign his splendour, his connexions, and his luxuries, to enter the peaceful cottage, away from the bustle of the world, to engage in agricultural labours, and to associate with those

whom he has been led to suppose are all innocence and simplicity. But, alas ! he soon finds that sin possesses the heart of the peasant as well as that of the courtier,—that vice is found alike in the village and the city,—and that the country, with all its charms, cannot render him happy without the possession of that divine “peace which passeth all understanding.” This will fill us with happiness, reside where we may ; and, destitute of it, the palace will be without happiness, society will impart no blessing on which the soul can feast, honour can give no genuine satisfaction, and the haunts of pleasure will afford no true enjoyment.

In the contemplation of the patriarchal ages, we must have observed that moral evil had not then risen to the awful pitch it has now attained ; for though sin really existed, it did not shew itself in so many forms as it does in the present day. The inhabitants of the world, as they were generally engaged in agricultural pursuits, and that in a country where art had done little to improve the soil, were compelled to live in remote stations, and seldom assembled to encourage each other in the ways of sin ; in addition to which, idleness and luxury, those parents of a thousand crimes, were nearly unknown, while shame would prevent many of the practices in which mankind at present too often glory.

We must not suppose, however, that even then iniquities awfully glaring, and cruelties painful to an extreme, were altogether unknown. Vice frequently triumphed, and virtue was often persecuted. The depravity of the heart burst all bounds, and, like the tempestuous sea, could not be stopped in its progress ; it refused attention to the voice of reason, and defied the restraints of authority, human or Divine. The tenderest feelings were violated,—the most consummate hypocrisy was practised, and all the obligations which one relative owes to another were trampled on. All this will be illustrated, as we consider Joseph in the pleasing character of an *affectionate brother*.

The first time this amiable youth is introduced to our notice by the inspired writer is, as feeling the tenderest concern on account of the faults that he saw committed by his brethren, and as reporting them to his venerable father. It must not be supposed that this was done from feelings of an improper kind, as though he would ingratiate himself into the affections of his parent by leading him to indulge an unfavourable opinion of the rest of his children ; he was grieved on account of their sins, and very properly hoped that the reproofs and instructions they would receive from their wise and pious monitor would check

the evils which he had attempted in vain to prevent. This conduct, however, while it raised him in the estimation of his father, provoked the enmity of his brethren, who from this time, such was their rage, "could not speak peaceably to him."

It is one of the awful effects of the depravity of man, that the simplicity and frankness which form a part of the disposition of many amiable persons, and which ought to recommend them to others, frequently operate to their disadvantage. Joseph had one dream after another which seemed to intimate that he should rise in society above his brethren. With all possible openness and artlessness he communicated them to his brethren, who at once saw their meaning, and probably imagined that he even now wished to assume authority over them. If, indeed, as is not improbable, Joseph related his dreams with a view of conciliating their good will, he was disappointed in his expectations, and soon found that he had so increased their malice and hatred, that they would henceforth thirst for his blood.

However the anger of his brethren was excited against him, Joseph knew that he could not be excused from the discharge of the duties that he owed to them. He felt all the affliction that is due from one branch of a family to another, and

when his brethren had been absent for many weeks, feeding their flocks at a distance of more than sixty miles from home, with what readiness did he attend to his father's request to visit them ! He knew they were exposed to danger in a neighbourhood where some of them had committed a daring outrage, and was assured that of such danger—as he went alone and unprotected—he would experience a full share. He had not forgotten that his brethren had been sorely displeased with him, but he hoped that the time which had elapsed since they saw each other had destroyed their animosity, and that they should meet in peace ; and with this disposition he set out on his journey. Those who experience correct and peaceable feelings themselves, are too apt, for their own safety, to give others credit for better views and dispositions than they really have.

We see then the young man on his errand of benevolence. Little does he suppose, that as soon as his brethren see him, they will begin to plot his murder ! They must surely have been accustomed to deeds of blood, or they would not have talked thus, and that in reference to a brother ! When he arrives where they are, he salutes them in terms of peace ; but they treat him first in a surly and morose manner, and then pro-

ceed to acts of violence. They strip him of his coat of many colours, in which the partiality of his father had clothed him; and, in language not at all reserved, they describe to him the treatment he has to expect.

It is by no means difficult to see that, in their conduct towards him, the brethren of Joseph were actuated by the principle of envy. This diabolical and worst of all dispositions had long reigned in their hearts, and now found an opportunity to complete its wicked designs. It is true that Joseph had given them no just cause of offence: Abel had never done Cain an injury; David had done Saul no harm; the Saviour had never injured the rulers of Israel; but all this prevented not their enemies from doing them injuries. "Envy," says an instructive writer, "views its object and cause as *good*—as a source of happiness—as actually rendering a fellow-creature happy, and, perhaps, honourable and useful too. At the benevolence which blesses its object, while it delights every well constituted mind, by the effects which it produces, and the scenes which it exhibits, envy repines and grieves. It is hurt by the light, and offended by the bounty of Heaven. It extracts poison and misery from excellence, usefulness, and happiness. Its eye is evil, because God is good, and its fellow-creatures are

blessed. Wrath and anger have sometimes a sympathetic feeling in heaven itself; that which excites them is censured by angels, and condemned by God. The storms which they raise on earth to punish their object, not unfrequently mingle with the tempests of Divine indignation from above; and the wrath of man, in that instance at least, works the righteousness of God. But envy works in opposition to every heavenly agent and sentiment; it is chagrined at that which God has bestowed in the exercise of his benevolence, and at that which angels contemplate with heavenly pleasure."

That Divine Being, who has all hearts in his hands, saw the movements and knew the designs of this guilty party, and interposed in behalf of his servant. The feelings of nature will sometimes work, even in the hearts of the cruel. Reuben, influenced by humanity and the fear of his father's anger, and Judah, by covetousness, united in opposing his being slain, and eventually it was resolved that such a crime should not be committed, but that their brother should be sold as a slave into Egypt.

Next to the sin of murder, it is hardly possible to conceive of a crime greater than that of dealing in the persons and liberties of our fellow-men. Slavery is a state abhorrent to every man

who has a just sense of the value of his liberty and his domestic comforts. How, then, must we view the men who can tear from the bosoms of their families—from the comforts of their homes—from the land that gave them birth, those who possess the same nature and feelings as themselves, and who claim relationship to them? Oh, what callousness of heart must such men possess! But many, very many are there to be found, who even now buy and sell those whom the Creator regards as their equals, and treat them with a cruelty they would not show to the brute creation. Such was the character of Joseph's brethren, who undervalued his affection, despised his entreaties, and sold him into slavery. But who can tell the agony their consciences endured on account of their crime, even to the end of their lives? The inspired writer has handed down their names to us branded with infamy, warning us against a sin at which all our sensibilities revolt.

We shall almost invariably find, that those who are cruel and unkind to some branches of their families, are deficient in their duties to the rest. The brethren of Joseph, having treated him with cruelty, lied to their father. They took home their brother's coat dyed in blood, leading Jacob to suppose that his son had been killed by a wild

beast ; they affected to condole with him on account of his loss, and imagined their brother would be heard of no more. But events of which they could form no conception were in the womb of Providence : the very plan they had adopted to degrade Joseph, and lead him to misery, would conduct him to honour and happiness.

Years rolled along : and while the amiable youth was supposed by his father and brethren to be dead, he passed through a series of changes, —was at length raised to distinguished honours in the court of Egypt, and enjoyed the blessing of Him who had long been the God of his fathers.

To obtain food in the time of famine, men will make many sacrifices, and do what at other times they would shrink from. Of this we have a striking proof in the case of the woman, who, in the season of extreme scarcity, slew her child for her sustenance. And so now : under any other circumstances, Jacob would have been unwilling that his sons should have gone down to that country ; for he had not forgotten the consequences of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac, leaving the promised land on similar occasions ; but hunger must be supplied, and as provision had been made in Egypt for the persons who needed a supply of corn, he sent his ten sons on that errand.

Arrived in that country, they were obliged to make personal application to the governor of the land, who himself attended to the requests of foreigners. No sooner did they enter his presence, than he recognised their features ; he knew them all ; while, owing to the various changes that twenty years had made in his person and circumstances, they had not the least knowledge of him ; nor could anything have been farther from their minds than that the governor of Egypt was no other than their brother Joseph.

What a remarkable fulfilment of his dreams would Joseph recognise when his brethren bowed down to him, and rendered him obeisance ! But he did not at once, as we might have expected, tell them who he was ; on the other hand, he treated them with severity, “and spake roughly unto them.” Nor was this at all inconsistent with his possessing towards them the warmest affection, seeing that he was desirous of making them sensible of their sins : he was desirous of obtaining all the knowledge he could about the family ; and his purposes as to the way in which he would make himself known were not fully matured. Besides all this, he wished in various ways to ascertain their present dispositions, and see how far they were worthy of his future confidence. As Joseph acted to-

wards his brethren, so does the blessed God act towards his people ; he tries them, to convince them of their sins, and to prove the existence and strength of their graces. “ Blessed is the man that endureth temptation ; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”

It frequently happens, that when persons are brought into circumstances of peculiar trial, it reminds them of their past sins, and they regard their sufferings as judgments brought down upon them by their crimes. Thus the poor woman, whose barrel of meal and cruse of oil had been increased by the prophet, when her son was removed by death, inquired of Elijah, “ What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God ? art thou come unto me *to call my sin to remembrance*, and to slay my son ? ” And so when the brethren of Joseph are thrown into prison, they are at once sensible of the crime they committed against him twenty years before, and said, “ We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear : therefore is this distress come upon us.” How little did they suppose that he whose face was clothed with severity, as he visited them from time to time, felt

all the tender emotions of an affectionate brother ; and that, when he dismissed the rest, detained Simeon that he might be sure to see them again, with his beloved brother Benjamin, for whom, as the child of his own mother, he naturally felt the tenderest regard.

Scarcely had they passed from the presence of the governor, than they discovered a new proof of his regard in the money they found in their sacks with the corn. One would have thought that this, in addition to the other surprising circumstances they had witnessed, would have excited something like suspicion as to who the governor might be ; but this does not appear to have been the case. They were probably too much impressed with the dark side of the picture even to recollect that it might have a light one. Joseph appears to have done much, both now and hereafter, with a view that they might know him ; but they remained ignorant of the person with whom they had to do, till he plainly told them that he was their brother.

We may very readily imagine, that he who could not refrain from weeping, even when they talked among themselves of their cruelty towards him, would take care of the comfort of Simeon in prison, and make his bonds light, would frequently visit him, and feel more than an ordinary

interest in the communications he made. And would he not think the time long before they made a second visit, and earnestly desire the interesting period when he should have an opportunity to tell them who he was ?

It is essential to the very existence of man, that he receive a continual supply of the bounties of Providence. The corn brought from Egypt by the sons of Jacob, notwithstanding the utmost frugality, in so large a family, would soon be exhausted ; and it was therefore needful that they should pay a second visit to that country on the same errand. Long and painful was the struggle carried on in the good old patriarch's mind, between affection and want ; but at length he was compelled to allow Benjamin to go with them. He, probably, had seen cause to suspect some unfair dealing towards Joseph, and he was not without his fears as to the safety of Benjamin. It is both pleasing and painful to see how anxious these sons were to satisfy their father's mind, and to hear their solemn assurances as to the safe return of his beloved son.

Having again arrived at the palace of the governor of Egypt, they are solicitous to obtain the good will of the steward, and to mention the circumstance of their money on a former occasion being returned. They succeed in their wishes,

and then prepare a present to the governor, in presenting which, they acknowledge their subjection, and entreat the enjoyment of his favour. Who does not watch with interest, profound and delightful, the events of this second interview ? With what kindness does he meet them ! What difficulty would he feel in keeping the secret that he was their brother ! Casting his eyes on the lovely Benjamin, he asks, " Is this your younger brother, of whom ye spake unto me ? And he said, God be gracious unto thee, my son." Never did the poet imagine, or the painter present, a scene more interesting and affecting than this. The eye fixes itself on the page of narration, while the imagination causes the various circumstances to pass before us, and the unbidden tear starts from the eye. But the time was not yet come when he would shew them who he was ; he therefore prudently retired to his chamber, to give vent to his feelings, and to present his thanksgivings to the God of his mercies.

When he had partly recovered from the strong feelings of agitation, he returned to his brethren ; and having placed them at the table, according to their ages, he sat down to dinner, sending them from his own table, at which he sat alone, a supply of their wants. This was shewing them peculiar honour ; but to Benjamin he shew-

ed still higher respect, by sending him a portion of food five times as large as those of the rest ; a mode of giving honour which was ever prevalent in the eastern countries. The circumstances of the governor having them to dine with him, and his placing them according to their ages, excited their astonishment, but they did not, even now, suspect who he was. How would he enjoy their company ! while his kind and amiable conduct towards them would lead us to suspect that he felt some relentings of heart on account of his former severity ; or rather, perhaps, that he saw so great an alteration for the better in them, that he could not forbear to shew them marks of his affection.

There are few enjoyments but what are followed with sharp and painful trials. After the sons of Jacob had experienced the kindness of the governor, and their sacks were again filled, they set out on their journey, hoping soon to arrive at the residence of their venerable parent. Joseph, with a view to ascertain the extent of their regard towards his beloved brother, has ordered his steward to place in Benjamin's sack the cup out of which he usually drank ; and when they had advanced a short distance towards Canaan, he sent messengers after them, charging them with the theft, and commanding their immediate return.

Never were persons placed in a situation more critical than they appeared to be, when the cup was found in the sack of their youngest brother. To deny the crime under such circumstances, however innocent they were, would be altogether useless ; had it been found in the possession of any of the rest, things had not been so bad ; as it was, they would be ready to say with their father, " All these things are against us."

We will not stay to dwell on the different feelings which would agitate the governor and his brethren as they were led back prisoners to his presence. How would they tremble ! And what must be his emotions as he argued the matter with them, while he knew that of this crime they were altogether innocent ? And when his brother Judah delivered his celebrated oration, in which he implored mercy for Benjamin for the sake of their beloved, aged, and already bereaved father, how must it pierce a heart like that of Joseph ! And, on the other hand, keenly did his brethren feel, when they imagined the justice of God was following them with new sorrows, for their conduct towards their amiable brother !

Never does the painter feel so much dissatisfied with himself, as when he finds that, after his utmost efforts, his pencil fails to delineate his subject in its beauty—that nature outstrips art,

and defies it to impart a glory equal to her own. Such are the feelings of the writer, when engaged on a history like that of Joseph. No pencil can paint, like that of the inspired penman, the delightful, the affecting scene of Joseph making himself known to his brethren. The Egyptians in attendance are ordered to withdraw, that they may not be witnesses of their master's intense feeling, or hear anything of the crimes of his brethren. The order of the governor being obeyed, he burst into tears, and, addressing those who stand before him as prisoners, he exclaims, "I am Joseph ; doth my father yet live ?—I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt." The feelings of each party baffle all description ; we will therefore, with an interesting lecturer on the subject, "follow the modest example of a celebrated painter, who, unable to delineate the agony of a father hanging over the corpse of an only child, hid his face in the robes which veiled her lifeless remains."

When he saw that the discovery of himself to his brethren had excited their fears on account of their past conduct to him, with what kindness does the governor remove their dread, and encourage their confidence !—how piously does he remind them of the superintending hand of Providence in the matter !—how kindly does he ad-

monish them not to debate among themselves who was the greatest or the least offender ! and with what affection does he send them back to Canaan, to fetch their families ; presenting a fine contrast to their conduct when they sold him as a slave into a strange land ! Their feelings of joy seem to have got the mastery of their prudence ; for when they arrived at their father's house, the joyful news, which should have been disclosed gradually, was abruptly told at once : an excuse, however, for this, may be found both in the nature of the intelligence itself, and in the excited state of their feelings.

Seventeen years do good old Jacob, his sons, and their families, reside together in Egypt, before death is permitted to make a separation among them. At length the aged sire is removed to a better world ; and now the brethren of the governor are again alarmed, lest he should remember and punish their crime. But they know not the extent of his benevolence, or the power of his religion. He removes their fears, and solemnly promises to continue the guardian of them and their families. More than fifty years rolled along, but at length Joseph also died, "in the midst of his brethren," having first solemnly commanded them to carry up his bones to the

land of Canaan, to be buried with theirs, whenever they removed from Egypt.

The lessons arising out of this portion of Joseph's history can only be glanced at. How strikingly does it display the awful effects of sin, as tending to destroy all the finer feelings of the soul, and preventing even the natural flow of the affections ! How forcibly does it shew us the power of conscience, and teach us that the sinner is his own tormentor ! How clearly do we see the importance of genuine piety to true dignity of character ! And, above all, how frequently are we reminded of Him of whom Joseph was an eminent type, who "was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." If we weep over the sufferings of Joseph, how much more should we indulge grief over our own sins, that put the son of God to death ? If we hear, with feelings of interest, Judah interceding for his brother, how much more admirable the conduct of Him who "ever liveth to make intercession for sinners." Let the Christian be content, like Joseph, to suffer for Christ, knowing, "that when He shall appear," he shall possess more joy than the brethren of Joseph ever knew, and be delivered from all grounds of fear ; he shall see his Saviour, and be separated from him no more, but "be ever with the Lord."

THE FAITHFUL STEWARD.

GEN. XXXIX.

I do proclaim
One honest man,—mistake me not,—but one ;
And he is a steward.

SHAKSPEARE.

Come, peace of mind, delightful guest !
Return, and make thy downy nest
Once more in this sad heart :
Nor riches I, nor power pursue,
Nor hold forbidden joys in view ;
We, therefore, need not part.

COWPER.

TH**E**RE are few things more essential to our happiness, or more difficult of attainment, than contentment with the stations in which the providence of God has placed us. Without this disposition, it is impossible to be happy ; for he who grasps at what he does not possess, shews his dissatisfaction with his present lot, and is restless and uneasy after the good that seems before him, which, when he possesses, only increases his desires after something more. Thus does the man

who expects happiness, in the present world, go on in seeking what he esteems the chief good, till death, stopping his career, ushers him into the light of another world, proves to him his mistake, and convinces him that all he pursued on earth was vain in its own nature, and unsatisfying in its possession.

The world, however, has occasionally presented us with persons who could adopt the language of an inspired Apostle, and say, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." And who have these persons been? Not those who have amassed the riches, or grasped at the petty enjoyments of earth; but those, rather, whose hearts have been raised above them, and who possessed an earnest desire for the enjoyments of heaven while they remained on earth. These persons, blessed as they are with the favour of Him who created the universe,—an interest in the promises of his love,—and the prospect of dwelling with him in heaven, are not filled with undue anxiety about the affairs of a world which they must shortly leave:

"They want but little, nor that little long."

Besides all this, they view every affair as governed by Infinite wisdom, and know he will perform all the good things his boundless benevo-

lence has designed for them. Amidst the disappointments and sorrows they have here to experience, they direct their eyes to him who sitteth in the heavens, and say, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."

Among the mysterious events which a Divine Providence has first permitted, and then overruled for good, few things are more striking than those recorded in the history of Joseph. It appears hard that so lovely a youth, so dutiful a son, so affectionate a brother, should be treated as he was. We should have expected that God would have delivered him from going down into Egypt, and have punished his brethren who designed to send him there. But instead of this, he allows the one to go into captivity, and the others to prosper awhile in their unrighteous conduct. We shall see, however, in the end, that all was right, and was designed to bring about the most important events;—to shew the wisdom of the Supreme Being, and "to save much people alive."

We now contemplate Joseph sold by the Ishmaelites, who had purchased him of his brethren, as a slave to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh. It was a very painful situation, and we might have expected that he would have escaped from it, and

have returned to his father's house. Had he done this, however, he must have injured Potiphar, who had fairly bought him ; he would too have hurt the mind of his father, by the representations he must have made of the conduct of his brethren, and have increased their rage against him. But the most powerful reason that can be assigned why Joseph staid in his unhappy situation was, that, his mind being influenced by the grace of God, he was satisfied that the hand of the Lord was in the whole affair, and that, when he pleased, he was able to release him from his captivity, and restore him to his former happiness.

That is a very delightful promise, and of universal application : “ When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.” Not only was Joseph blessed with contentment in his station, and enabled with patience to submit to the trials connected with it,—but He with whom he held communion as the father of his spirit, and as his refuge in every hour of trial, caused his master to treat him with respect, and raise him to a station more honourable than the one he had been destined to fill when he was first brought into Egypt.

The favours of the blessed God are always suited to the circumstances of those to whom

they are given. In the hour of extreme sorrow we need more than usual supports ; and He who is described as “ the consolation of Israel ” is ever near to afford them. When Joseph became a “ stranger in a strange land,” the God of his fathers “ was with him.” And what could he want more than this to make him happy ? He possessed more riches than his master, more honour than Pharaoh, and more pleasure than all Egypt could afford him. The comforts of God delighted his soul, he prospered in spiritual enjoyments, and in bodily health. And though he must sometimes have felt a desire to return to Canaan, yet did he rejoice in the providence of God, that had made him happy in the house of his master, the Egyptian. It is the Divine favour which makes us blessed, and not a residence in the lordly hall, or the magnificent palace ; it is his presence which fills us with true enjoyment, and not that of our relatives, however great the affection they may bear towards us.

It is a fact which is very frequently placed before us in the sacred volume, that men are often blessed on account of the people of God, with whom they may be connected. The master of Joseph was blessed for his sake ; the house of Obed-edom was blessed for the sake of the ark of God which was in it ; the house of Naaman was

blessed for the sake of the pious Hebrew maid, who had been carried captive from the land of Israel, and who waited on his wife. Indeed, so strongly was this idea imprest on the mind of many, that in the days of the Judges, when a covetous professor had engaged a strolling priest to conduct his religious exercises, he said, "Now know I that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest." In this conduct Jehovah appears as the Supreme Governor of all human affairs,—shews the love he bears to his people,—illustrates the advantages of true piety, and proves the truth of his own word, "that his people are the salt of the earth," preserving it from destruction.

The diligence of Joseph in the acquirement of the language of the country,—his industry in the discharge of his duty,—his honesty in transacting his master's business,—the cheerfulness with which he submitted to perform the most degrading duties which devolved upon him,—and, above all, his unostentatious, but fervent piety, won upon his master, and convinced him that this young man must be a favourite of the Supreme Deity, who was alone worshipped by the Hebrews. How much good may even servants do by a kind and Christian-like conduct towards their masters! They need not talk much of

their religion ; if it exists in their hearts, and appears in their conduct, it will be seen, and may produce effects that will astonish them. Potiphar, though an heathen, saw "that the Lord was with Joseph," and he raised him, from being an inferior slave, to be the "overseer," or steward of his house. putting all his affairs into his hands, and leaving them to his direction. Let us, in every station in which we may be placed, make much of God, and be concerned to shew forth his glory by a conduct consistent with our profession of love to him, and regard to his law.

Ten or eleven years rolled away ; and Joseph was quite as happy as his residence among those who knew not God could allow him to be. He had almost forgotten the endearments of home, as well as the cruelty of his brethren : he imagined he had now found a resting-place, and probably expected to live and die in the service of his master. But we know not what a day may bring forth. While Joseph was happy in his station, and still happier in the service of his God, adversity was wringing sorrows into his cup, and preparing a prison for his residence. We often need to be exercised with trials, or else, like this amiable young man, we should be content to take up our residence in our enemy's land. The afflictive dispensations of the Divine hand teach us our

state of dependence, and shew us the true source of blessedness.

One of the most dangerous enemies that can infest our way is sensual pleasure. It is far easier to resist the temptations of Satan in any other form than when they unite with the propensities of our nature. How important, then, that we exercise the utmost vigilance over ourselves, and direct our prayer to the God of our mercies that we may be kept from dishonour and disgrace. No foe is more dangerous than an evil-designing woman, who lieth in wait to deceive the youth she professes to love, but whose ruin she is actually accomplishing. Well might the wise man say that, "her feet take hold on hell." O let it be the constant concern of my juvenile readers to shun the path which may indeed seem pleasant, but which in the end leads to ruin, and to death.

The precise nature of the temptation to which Jehovah was exposed need not now to be enlarged on. I would rather direct the attention of my readers to the spirit displayed by him on an occasion which powerfully tried his virtue, and put his religion to the severest test. Thus shall we see how grace triumphs over nature, and religion exalts and dignifies its possessor.

An old commentator has remarked, "that as

the beams of the sun shining upon fire doth discourage its burning, so should God's mercies or man's favours quell lust and licentiousness in us." Joseph shewed a noble indignation against sin, even when presented to him in its most attractive form. He reminds his mistress of the honour to which his master had raised him, intimating that to comply with her requests would be the height of ingratitude; and lest this should not be sufficient to stop her progress in the way of iniquity, he asks, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Here was the principle which governed his conduct—the fear of God. It was not merely the good resolutions he had formed which kept him from sin, but a deep and abiding conviction of the obligations under which he lay to Jehovah—a recollection of the claims of his law—and a realizing sense of his presence. O, if we felt, as we ought to do, what we owe to the Supreme Being, if we ever continued to remember that he beholds all our goings, and thought of the incalculable mischief which sin effects among our fellow-creatures, what different persons should we be, to what we now are! Let us, like Joseph, not merely feel a spirit of indignation against sin in the first instance; but let us boldly remonstrate against it, be firm in our opposition to it, and, if it be necessary, flee from

it, even though the flight itself may expose us to danger.

There is one circumstance connected with the narrative which at first view excites our surprise. When Potiphar returned, and his wife charged Joseph with a crime of the most heinous nature, it appears singular that he does not attempt to defend himself. But it may be observed, that he could not do this without criminating his mistress in the eyes of her husband, and thus destroying the happiness of their lives ever after. Besides this, as he had no witnesses to make good the assertions he could make, he might justly imagine that a defence on his part, even though true, would only aggravate his punishment. It is, however, worthy our remark, that the law which considered this crime a capital offence, and punished it with death, was not executed. It is not improbable, but that Potiphar might suspect the deception of his wife, and infer, from the whole tenour of Joseph's conduct, his innocence of the crime laid to his charge. Instead therefore of executing the punishment the law inflicted, "he put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were bound."

It may appear mysterious to us that the blessed God permits his people sometimes to "suffer as evil doers;" but we know that he has impor-

tant reasons for all that he allows, and that in some future day the righteousness of his people shall shine as the noon-day sun, and all his conduct shall be justified to the world. Those who are now suffering under false accusations may safely commit their cause to "him who judgeth righteously," and hope for the return of prosperous days. Joseph found that the prison was the way to a throne, and those who now suffer in the cause of virtue and religion, may rely not merely on an acquittal at the bar of Jehovah, in the presence of an assembled universe, but on being crowned with honours substantial as they are pure, and lasting as they are satisfying.

While considering the conduct of Joseph in the house of Potiphar, every reader must have been struck with the coincidence between Joseph and the blessed Redeemer, of whom he was so eminent a type. They were both tempted, and both resisted the tempter, and came off victorious ; affording us encouragement to resist also, that he may flee from us. The subject suggests to us the importance of praying to be enabled to contend against the enemy of our souls, since listening to his suggestions is attended with the most direful effects. We see in the case of Joseph that true religion will make a man respected in every station of society. As the Great Source of all good

blesses one man for the sake of another, let us associate ourselves with the people of God; and above all, let us seek blessings from Heaven, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord, "whom the Father always heareth"

THE PIOUS PRISONER.

GEN. XXXIX.—XL.

————— The oppressor holds
His body bound, but knows not what a range
His spirit takes, unconscious of a chain ;
And that to bind him is a vain attempt,
Whom God delights in, and in whom he dwells.

COWPER.

THE most indifferent spectator of what passes on the stage of the world must have been struck with the apparent confusion in which its affairs are involved ; and be impressed with the fact, that the present state is one of trial or probation. The ancient philosophers, unblest as they were with the light of Revelation, supposed that the trials of life were designed to afford illustrations of the virtues of the good, and that a period would probably arrive when the mighty Governor of the world would reward the men who, notwithstanding their sufferings, had walked in the paths of virtue, and would punish those who indulged in the practice of vice. The knowledge derived

from reason is confirmed and improved by Revelation. Here we are introduced to a Being who sitteth in the heavens, controlling the affairs of the universe, and doing whatsoever pleases him. To fulfil the designs of his wisdom, and to furnish an opportunity for the display of the holy principles which he has implanted in the hearts of his people, as well as to shew the awful depravity of which we are the natural subjects, he allows men, to a very considerable extent, to go on in their own ways. And oh, what scenes of wickedness do we sometimes witness ! What conduct is shewn by the slaves of Satan towards those who have left his service, and have devoted themselves to that of Heaven ! How do they seek to injure their reputation, destroy their comfort, and, in many instances, deprive them even of their lives ! On the other hand, what delightful evidences of the power of truth on the heart have we seen in the patience with which Christians have borne their trials,—the constancy with which they have sought the good of their persecutors,—and the simple reliance they have placed on the promises of Jehovah !

In the midst of all this apparent confusion, we must not forget, that He who presides over the affairs of the world will both support his people under their trials, and in due time deliver them

out of all their sufferings. He may now allow virtue to be treated as though it were vice ;—he may permit his people to be immured in prisons, and even suffer some of them to be burnt at the stake, that the reality and the power of their religion may be made manifest ; but when he has accomplished the designs he has formed, he will shew us the principles which regulated his conduct, and thus exhibit the infinite glory of his own character, the superiority of holiness, and the odious deformity of sin.

When we read the history of Joseph, we are not a little surprised and grieved to find that a youth of such extraordinary piety, and who displayed the strength of that piety as overcoming temptation in its strongest forms, is treated as one of the vilest of men. Prisons are only designed for the residence of those whose sins destroy the peace and injure the safety of society ; but they have sometimes been occupied by men “of whom the world was not worthy ;” and in some instances they have proved the means, in the hands of God, of elevating his servants to honours, to which they could not otherwise have been raised.

I need not remind my readers of the nature of the crime with which Joseph is charged, as we have referred to it in our preceding paper. And

if we pause again to express our surprise that death, the sentence awarded to it by law, was not executed, it will only lead us to admire the goodness of that Being who controls the passions of men, and restrains their wrath. He would not, in this instance at least, allow the innocent to suffer as the guilty ; and though he permits him to be cast into prison, he will make his humiliation the means of raising him to the highest dignity in the court of Egypt, and to immortal honours on the page of inspiration.

In whatever circumstances the people of God may be placed, their character, and the principles by which they are governed, will soon be known. Religion, though it makes no noise, encircles its possessor with a glory which distinguishes him above his fellows, and makes him so prominent, that he cannot be hid. Joseph may be treated as one whose sins render him unfit to enjoy the advantages of society,—he may be thrust into a dungeon, and the irons may enter his soul,—but even there he shall be happy, and his worth shall become known. “The Lord was with Joseph ;” and his presence was enough to raise his mind above his trials, and to guide him in a way that should influence the jailer to put confidence in him, and place the other prisoners under his care, as well as to crown with prosperity every

work in which he was engaged. In the house of Potiphar he was raised to the honour of having everything placed under his charge, and it was precisely the same in the prison. The fear of the Lord confers on its subject a true respectability in the eyes of men, and compels them practically to admit, that "the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour."

The spirit of true religion is one of genuine benevolence. Had a proud haughty man, destitute of holy principles, but innocent of any glaring crime, been thrown into a dungeon, like Joseph, he would have disdained to have had any kind of communication with those who had been placed there in consequence of actual transgression. This, however, was not the case with this pious young man. Two of the servants of the king, his butler and his chief baker, had, it has been supposed, engaged in a conspiracy against his life and government, for which he had thrust them into prison. As Pharaoh was "wroth" with them, and was possessed of arbitrary power, it is rather surprising that he did not at once deprive them of life; but He who has the hearts of all men in his hand, and who turneth even the heart of the king, inclined him to send them to prison, as by the means of one of these he would ultimately deliver his servant. We are frequently

unable to account for remarkable actions on the part of our governors ; but are too apt to forget that the providence of God, by their means, may be accomplishing important designs. Three persons were specially committed to the care of Joseph, who treated them with all the kindness which a regard to the security of their persons would permit.

Whatever controversy the subject may now admit of, it is certain that the blessed God frequently, in the early ages of time, used to convey intimations of his will, and the knowledge of future events, by dreams ; and this not only to his own people, but also to the heathen nations. The explanation of dreams formed a real or supposed science, which was studied, and that professionally, by no inconsiderable number of persons in different countries. One night, each of the servants of Pharaoh had a singular dream, which they were unable to understand ; and as they had no access to those whose province it was to interpret dreams, they were filled with anxiety and grief. As Joseph visited them on the following morning, he saw the sorrow of which they were the subjects depicted on their countenances, and very kindly inquired into its cause. They candidly explained to him the reason of their trouble, expecting, no doubt, to receive the sympathy

which lightens the burden of sorrow ; nor were they disappointed ; for he had learned to weep with those in grief, and to sympathize with these men, as one “bound with them.”

There are few situations in which Joseph could have been placed that would have displayed to greater advantage the feelings of his heart, or that could have more strikingly illustrated his humility, and his devotedness to the God of Israel than this. He “condescends to men of low estate,”—he inquires into their sorrows,—conveys, in the kindest manner, the intimation that the God he served possessed all wisdom, and was able to remove their perplexities,—and intimates that, in answer to prayer, he would communicate to him the information they so anxiously desired. All this he spoke under the immediate direction and inspiration of Jehovah, who was thus accomplishing designs unknown even to Joseph.

Having by his former conduct, as well as his present frankness and candour, obtained the confidence of these persons, they freely tell him their dreams. And in the interpretation of them, we indeed find him “one of a thousand.” While we admire his benevolence, we are equally struck with his fidelity. He would fain have communicated intelligence equally happy to each ; but this, neither the duty he owed to God, from

whom he received his message, the regard he must pay to his own conscience, or the debt of justice due to them, would allow. He informed the butler that in three days he would be restored to his former station in the house of Pharaoh ; and the baker, that his royal master would, at the same time, deprive him of his life. While this news would be agreeable to the one, it would much distress the mind of the other, who would rather have had smooth things proclaimed in his ears. But it ever becomes those whose office it is to explain the Divine will to be faithful to their trust. Had Joseph told the baker that he also should be restored, it would have given him present pleasure, but into what a delusion had he been led ! To allow sinners to deceive themselves in matters of eternal importance, as is too frequently done, is cruelty which the most powerful language cannot fully represent. How melancholy had been the situation of the chief baker, had Joseph allowed him to hope for re-admission into the house of Pharaoh, when the executioner came but three days after to deprive him of his life ; and how much more distressing the state of the man who, through life, indulges a system of religious opinions which encourages him in his sins, and leads him to expect with confidence the joys of heaven at the hand of his Judge, when

he shall be driven from the source of all happiness, and shall fall into the regions of absolute misery. Far safer is the man who tremblingly listens to the scriptural representations of his danger, and flees to Jesus as the refuge of his soul, than he who indulges in confidence which must infallibly end in disappointment and shame.

It appears highly probable that the dreams with which Joseph had been favoured in his youth, of the dignity to which he should be raised, were designed to afford him comfort under the sorrows he should be called to experience ; and they seem to have had this effect, "He judged him faithful who had promised," and believed he was able to perform his words. When these servants of Pharaoh had dreamt, and he foresaw the return of the chief butler to honour, it is by no means improbable that he might suppose by his means the object would be accomplished. Little did he imagine that he had two long years yet to endure his bondage. Who can read the pathetic address of Joseph to the chief butler without emotion ? "Think on me, when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house."

What he had almost a right to demand, he here solicited as a favour. It is true that his situ-

ation had been made tolerable, and he was enabled patiently to bear it ; but it was yet degrading, while he was unjustly deprived of many of the enjoyments of life, and he was therefore perfectly justifiable in desiring to be freed from it. Wishing to put the butler in possession of all the facts which could interest him in his favour, and promote the desired end, he went on to inform him, that he was in the first instance stolen from the land of the Hebrews, being brought from thence, without the consent of either his father or himself ; and though he had been bought by the Midianites, it had been of those who had no right to sell him, and in a way which the law of God condemned as unjust. He asserted farther, that he had done nothing why he should be confined in the prison. It is well worthy of our remark, that while Joseph defended himself, and protested his innocence, he neither criminated his brethren nor his mistress. There was certainly wrong somewhere, but it was enough for Joseph to shew that it was not with him.

Joseph had a very reasonable right to expect that the request he had made to the servant of Pharaoh, who was about being restored to his station, would be attended to. He had shewn him much kindness in the hour of adversity, and it was but just to require a return of it when

it lay in his power. But, alas ! men are almost universally selfish, and care for the interests of none but themselves. It is probable that the butler, like our fellow creatures generally, made very fair promises, assured him of his influence, and excited the warmest hopes ; a practice, alas ! too often indulged in by courtiers,—“ yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him.” In prison he continued to lie for many long and wearisome months ; till the hand of God was stretched forth for his deliverance, which was effected by a providence as mysterious as any of which we can conceive, and which we shall endeavour to illustrate in our next paper.

The circumstances which have now passed under our review teach us the propriety of setting Jehovah always before us, and making him the guide of our lives. We see that though the pious man may for awhile lie under the cloud of degradation, and be subject to persecution, yet that God will appear for him, and deliver him out of all his trials. We learn the odious nature, and see the detestable fruits, of ingratitude,—a vice which God abhors, which man execrates while he practises it, and which some earthly governments have punished with severity. While we hate it in others, let us not practise it ourselves, either towards God or our fellow crea-

tures. And lastly, we are reminded of that Jesus who stooped from his throne, and, for our sakes, became a prisoner in the grave ; from whence he rose to the right hand of his Father, where he is adored as “ Lord of all,” and where he ever sits, scattering the richest favours on the perishing children of Adam.

THE RIGHTEOUS GOVERNOR.

GEN. XLI.—L.

I never did behold a man less proud,
More dignified, or grateful to admire,
Than was this ruler.
His fortunes nothing teased him from himself,
And he but filled his fortunes like a man,
Who did intend to honour them as much
As they could honour him.

HOWARD.

To a believer in Divine Revelation, it is a pleasing and consolatory thought, that He who created the world governs the affairs of all his creatures. Amidst the trials inseparable from humanity, the infidel has no support, and from them he has no refuge. Had not the excellent and amiable Joseph possessed the knowledge of the God of his fathers, he had pined with discontent in the house of Potiphar, or have died in despair in the gloomy recesses of a prison. But supported by faith in the being and providence of Jehovah, persuaded that all things were working for his good, he rose superior to his trials,

and looked forward to the period when the designs of the blessed God in his sufferings should be fulfilled, and he should be exalted to prosperity and honour.

It has sometimes been the case, that when God has seen fit to try his people by adversity, he has prepared them for their trials by previous communications of his favour, and has endowed them with strength to endure bodily or mental pains, to glorify him in the fires of affliction, and to expect a glorious deliverance from them all. In early life, as we have already seen, Joseph had intimations, by repeated dreams, of the honours which awaited him ; and though his father attempted to check what he might possibly consider the risings of ambition, and the humility which so eminently adorned the character of Joseph prevented him, as he grew older, from talking of them, there can be little doubt but that his prophetic visions supported him under his sorrows, and that the honours to which he rose did not fill him with the surprise which they otherwise would have done.

It would, indeed, be very trying to Joseph, who thus expected to rise to honour and dignity, to be sold by his brethren as a slave,—to lie year after year in prison,—to suffer the sorrows of absence from his father,—and to hear the revilings

of the heathen against his God. But he relied on the Divine testimony, he cast his care on the Being who supports the universe, and waited, in the exercise of hope, for the day when he should "see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

The blessed God very frequently instructs us in his sovereignty, his wisdom, and his power, by the disappointments he allows us to experience, and the manner in which he ultimately delivers us from our trials. When Joseph in prison had interpreted the dream of Pharaoh's chief butler, and foretold his restoration to honour, he very naturally expected that by his means he should be brought out of prison, and that his innocence would be vindicated ; but he was mistaken ; all this was forgotten ; the butler was ungrateful, and Joseph for two long years yet remained a prisoner. Perhaps he had now begun to expect that here he must die ; but, behold, Jehovah works in his own way, and in a manner least expected his servant shall be raised to honour. Little had he imagined that the prison was the road to preferment ; and as little would he suppose, now that two years had elapsed from the event, that his interpretation of the butler's dream would bring him before Pharaoh.

In more instances than one has the Governor

of the world employed the most unlikely means, and selected what have appeared the most unsuitable persons, to accomplish his purposes. Had we lived when the Saviour was on earth, knowing he had determined to appoint a number of persons to publish his gospel, we should have expected that he would have chosen men of influence, of talent, and of learning to have performed so great a work ; but instead of this, that the cause might appear entirely his own, he chose the foolish things of the world to confound those that were wise, and the weak things of the world to put to nought those that were strong. Had we lived in the days of Pharaoh, we should have acted like him, and have fled to the magicians for an interpretation of our dreams. Had we been in the place of Nebuchadnezzar, we had gone to the wise men of Babylon for help. But in all these cases God had resolved to make his own character known, and to bring his servants to honour. The illustration of this remark in the case of Joseph is very striking. The king of Egypt shall be troubled on his throne, that the prisoner Joseph may be promoted to dignity ;—the magicians shall be confounded that Jehovah may be glorified.

In the days of antiquity, *Pharaoh* was a name taken by all the sovereigns of Egypt, as Cæsar

was in after-times adopted by the emperors of Rome, and Czar by those of Russia. The reigning monarch of Egypt in the days of Joseph was one night much troubled by dreams. In this manner, intimations had been given him of an approaching supply of corn, which should be succeeded by a famine, that should last for the long period of seven years. Such, however, were the precise means employed to convey this information, that the magicians, with all their wisdom, were unable to explain them. And now that the chief butler saw it would please his sovereign, and promote his own interest, he states his recollection of his former improper conduct which led his king to throw him into prison; he informs his royal master that his restoration to office had been foretold by a fellow-prisoner, and intimates the probability that he could interpret in like manner the dream of the king. Self-interest will sometimes lead us to discharge duties which, on other accounts, we should entirely neglect: so in this instance, "the chief butler remembered not Joseph, but forgot him;" but when he saw the probability of promoting his own advantage by it, he introduces his name to the notice of the monarch.

It is with great pleasure that we hear the command for the appearance of Joseph before Pha-

raoh ; and, in imagination, we accompany him with feelings of the deepest interest. We see him display, on this occasion, the same spirit of piety and humility which had distinguished him through life. When the monarch tells him the report he has heard of his wisdom, and expresses a confidence that he can interpret the dream he has had, Joseph replies with singular modesty and simplicity of heart, "It is not in me : God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace." Intimating by this language, that he was but a man, like the magicians ; and if, as he expected, he could be the means of interpreting the dreams of Pharaoh, the honour would be due to God, and not to himself. Having laid the foundation of his work in piety, we are neither surprised at his succeeding in interpreting the dreams, or at his being raised to the highest dignity he could possibly enjoy. We seem to walk in the procession, when Joseph is exalted in the sight of the people ; we almost join in their acclamations, and feel satisfaction and confidence in the thought that the affairs of the state will go on well, seeing that the king has a minister "in whom the Spirit of God is."

It seldom happens when a man is suddenly raised from an obscure station in life to the possession of great honours, that he maintains a hum-

ble spirit. The best of men are but frail and imperfect creatures, easily elevated above themselves, and forgetting for a time the emptiness of earthly good. It is only the individual who fully believes the word of God, keeps near to his throne, and by daily intercourse with him has learnt the superior value of the world to come, who appreciates the present state as he ought. Happily for Joseph, grace was given him corresponding to his station, and when raised to occupy the seat of dignity next to his sovereign, he continued to manifest his accustomed humility. He was still a man of prayer, yet attended to the all-important duties of religion, ruled his family in the fear of God, and impressed on the minds of his servants the knowledge of Jehovah. In all this he sets a very proper example of the way in which they should act who have to conduct the affairs of the state. They must not plead their want of time to attend to the important concerns of eternity, seeing that Joseph, who was so fully occupied in the affairs of a vast empire, could discharge the superior claims of devotion and religion. The first things to be attended to, are the duties we owe to God ; and if we devote this time to other pursuits, we rob him of his just demands.

Every station and office we can fill has its pe-

culiar temptations, and furnishes opportunities for the display of human depravity, as well as the exercise of Christian graces. The splendours of a court, and association with the great, are unfavourable to pure undefiled religion. Notwithstanding all the piety of Joseph, we find him improperly marrying the daughter of an idolatrous priest. Such a marriage would bring with it its own punishment, both in the happiness of which it deprived him, and which he would have enjoyed had his wife possessed the spirit of piety like himself, and in the positive sufferings it would inflict. The conduct of Joseph in this instance cannot be justified, and to it we must probably attribute his improper conduct on a subsequent occasion, when we find him profanely swearing by the life of Pharaoh. How necessary the prayer taught us by the Saviour, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

The diligence of Joseph in travelling throughout the land of Egypt, and the integrity and prudence he manifested, in buying and storing up the corn, must excite our admiration. And when the famine commenced, instead of leaving the sale of corn to others, as he might have done, he superintended it himself. In the discharge of his duties he manifested no partiality. When his brethren came, and he well knew them, he per-

formed his duty as a governor, taking care to satisfy all around him that he would not allow any who might be suspected of being spies, or enemies of Pharaoh, to be fed with the provisions which had been reserved only for his friends. And when, after a series of years, his father, with his brethren, and their families, came to take up their residence in Egypt, he did not allow them to live in idleness as pensioners on the state, but placed them in a situation where they could both obtain their own livelihood, and contribute to the welfare of the country. In all this he manifested a fine and noble spirit, and shewed the happy tendency of religious principles to make their possessors a blessing to society.

In investigating the character of Joseph as the ruler of Egypt, it is proper we should notice a charge which has been preferred against him, by some who are ever anxious to point out defects in the character of those who profess godliness. It has been said that Joseph acted improperly in depriving the Egyptians of their liberties, by requiring them to give up their lands, and, after that, their personal services, to Pharaoh, in order that they might possess the food necessary to maintain their existence. But, surely, the persons who have preferred this charge have never fairly and fully examined the account. Let it be

remembered that the government of Egypt was essentially different to the constitution of the happy country in which we live. The dominion of Pharaoh was altogether arbitrary ; the people had no voice in making the laws, but were compelled to obey them, even though they merely resulted from the caprices of their sovereign ; nor had they or their rulers any just notions of liberty, a blessing which has only been enjoyed in countries where the religion of the Bible has prevailed. Let it also be taken into the account, that for the land and the people to become the property of the king, was the offer of the people themselves, and not the proposal of Joseph ; and once more, though they were accepted by Joseph at the time, yet he afterwards restored four-fifths of the produce of the land to the people, reserving one-fifth only for Pharaoh ; no more than is at present paid by the inhabitants of some countries for the expenses of the state. It is certain that the Egyptians were highly pleased with the conduct of their ruler ; and, in such a case, they must be allowed to have been the best judges.

However wisely a ruler may discharge the duties of his office, and however great a blessing he may be to society, a period must arrive when death shall strip him of his robes, and lay him in the silent grave. For about eighty years did

Joseph preside, under the monarch, over the affairs of Egypt ; but he at length died, at an advanced age, in the exercise of firm faith in the promises of God, and amidst the regrets of his children, his brethren, and the nation at large. Happy the man who, when he comes to a death-bed, can repose on the testimony of Jehovah, and can exchange time for eternity, without fear of banishment "from the presence of God, and from the glory of his power."

As we have passed over the history of this amiable man, we have pointed out some of the lessons it was designed to teach. In addition to those already referred to, we see the importance of feeling entire resignation to the will of God, seeing that from the lowest degradation he can raise us to the highest honour. We learn with what gratitude we ought to regard a pious education, which guards us from so many dangers ; and feel that he is the wisest man who ever acts in obedience to the law of God, and ever seeks to him for direction in all his ways.

THE MISTAKEN SAINT.

GEN. XLII.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain.

COWPER.

It is both interesting and profitable to review the lives and sorrows of the people of God in past ages. As we read of the various incidents which attended them through life, we seem to possess their feelings, desire to imitate their virtues, and are anxious to avoid their defects. We feel sympathy with them in their sorrows, and as we see them pouring out their griefs before a throne of grace, and deriving support from "the God of all consolation," we rejoice that we have the same Father to flee to, the same arguments to plead before him, and the same encouragement to expect a gracious attention to our prayers.

Few of the patriarchs present a more interesting character for our contemplation than Jacob. He was a man of genuine worth. That he was

the subject of many imperfections we cannot deny, but that he eminently displayed many virtues is equally evident. We may profit greatly by the account given us of his errors and mistakes; and it will be happy for us if the review of his improprieties should guard us from falling into them ourselves.

The view which even the good man takes of the divine conduct is often very contracted; there remains in the hearts of even the best men, a spirit of depravity, prone to misinterpret, and murmur against the providence of God; while Jehovah is pleased to clothe his dealings with us in mystery. These things may account for Jacob saying, on the occasion to which our attention is now directed, "All these things are against me."

Language like this it is painful to hear, and the man who utters it must surely be in very distressing circumstances. What! Is all darkness? Are there no light clouds in the horizon? Is there no sweetness in the cup of sorrow? Was there nothing to comfort him amidst his disasters? Of light and comfort he will not hear; he yields to the influence of despondency, and says, "All these things are against me."

And who that considers his trials can be surprised at the exclamation? Look at him in

youth ;—exiled from the house of an indulgent father, and a still more affectionate mother,—called to endure the persecution of a wicked brother,—compelled to labour as a servant for his food,—and oppressed by his master, who owed him every display of kindness. See him in middle age ;—when he enters on the enjoyments of domestic life, he loses his beloved Rachel, and then his darling Joseph. No wonder that he thinks all things are opposed to his happiness.

His present condition too is painful, and seems to justify the language. It had been well if his sorrows had past, and brighter prospects opening before him. But the present is painful, and the future gloomy. He has a family of ungodly children, who pierce his heart through with many sorrows ;—he is threatened with poverty ;—his son Simeon has just been taken from him, and he dreads the worst ; he begins to bend under the infirmities of age ;—and he is called upon to give up his beloved Benjamin ; in a word, he thinks his grey hairs are hastening in sorrow to the grave. And who, then, can wonder at his exclaiming, “ All these things are against me ? ”

But yet he was mistaken. His views were not correct. Had what he said been true, it was calculated to humble him, and should have led to sorrow, on account of sin. We have no right

to complain of the dispensations of Jehovah, however severe ; for “ wherefore should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins ? ” If we set ourselves against God, we ought not to murmur if his providence is against us. But the language is that of mistake. ‘ These things were not against him ; they would not bear him down to the grave. Let him look over his life again. If he had been exiled from home, the Lord had found him another and a better ; if he had laboured, the Supreme Governor had given him a reward ; if he had been persecuted, he had also been supported under it ; if he had been oppressed, the Divine hand had interposed in his favour ; if Jehovah had taken away his beloved Rachel, he had given Himself ; and if Joseph be indeed gone, he shall see him, and his endeared Rachel, and each of his pious friends, in a future world. Let him look at his present state ; and, if poverty threatens him with its approach, is not God also at his right hand ? If his children are wicked, and he cannot accuse himself of neglect, or of improper indulgences extended to them, why should he be so much discouraged ? If Joseph, and Simeon, and Benjamin are all removed, all is under the superintendence of Him who must do right. And what a mistake in reference to the future ! The dark clouds, that now hover over him,

“Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on his head.”

Joseph is yet alive,—Simeon shall soon be free,—Benjamin is about to be elevated to honour,—and a fine old age of peace and happiness awaits the patriarch himself. Ah, what mistaken views do the people of God form, when they say, “All these things are against me!” No such thing: all work together for good to those who love God. All was now tending to accomplish the infinitely wise plans of Jehovah, to make Jacob’s family happy, and “to save much people alive.”

Christians now make the same mistake that Jacob did, when afflictions overtake them, and sorrows seem to oppress their souls. But they are wrong; for they are designed to sanctify their hearts, to teach them the sinfulness and vanity of the world, to endear to them the promises of infinite love, and to prepare them for the enjoyments of the heavenly state.

But this mistake of Jacob was not only a great, but a *criminal* one. Most of our errors are of a sinful character, and those which resemble this are very criminal. The language of Jacob seemed to reflect on the Divine character. Is not God the friend and the father of his people? Does he not love them, and can he change in

the purposes of his grace towards them ? Why should such a thought be indulged ? Has he not said, “ I, the Lord, change not ? ” And does he not possess all the power we need to protect us, and which is requisite to accomplish the designs of his love ? Has he not the wisdom which can convert our sorest trials into the greatest benefits ? Has he not always delivered us, and would it not be our wisest plan to say, “ He, who hath delivered, will yet deliver ? ” Why, because all is dark and enveloped in misery, should we encourage our fears ? If we loved God as we ought to do, we should indulge a confidence that he would direct all for our good.

Farther, the language of Jacob breathed a spirit of disbelief of the Divine promises. God had expressly assured him that, in all places where he went, he would be with him, and that he would never leave him till he had accomplished all the purposes of his mercy towards him. Jacob had acted wisely for his own happiness, and honourably towards his Creator, had he believed this, and allowed the whole of his conduct to be influenced by it. This, however, was not the case ; and in this respect the people of Jehovah are ever too much like him. What room for repentance and humility ! This criminal conduct was not confined to the person

or the times of Jacob. Though the Lord has ever been kind to his people, we have hearts disposed to murmur against all his arrangements, and to say that all is against us ; when, if we could see the whole of his designs, we should know the reverse to be true.

Let us cast a glance towards Jacob when "the mystery of God" towards him "is finished," and he is comfortably settled in Goshen. Would he not now be ashamed that ever he encouraged the feelings of despondency, or entertained hard thoughts of God ? Would he not be concerned to humble himself before the Author of his mercies, who had raised him above all his fears ! Oh what gratitude must he feel to that Being who had been his friend amidst so many murmurings, and notwithstanding so much impropriety of conduct ! His future hopes would be encouraged by a recollection of what God had done for him. And he would be concerned to encourage his children, and his children's children, to let their faith and hope be in God. Let it be the solicitude of each of my readers in this respect to imitate the venerable patriarch.

"All things," saith an inspired apostle, "work together for good to those who love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." The grand inquiry then is, do we love

him ? If so, we have nothing to fear, for He is our friend, his providence is on our side, and nothing can be against us. But if we have no love to Him, nothing can be for us, but all must be armed in opposition to us. Let us seek an interest in his mercy, and we shall then sing for ever, “ He hath done all things well !”

And before we finally leave this subject, let us humbly resolve, in the strength of Divine grace, to trust God more than we have hitherto done, even when his conduct is enveloped in mystery ; let us weep over our past mistakes and ingratitude ; and let us encourage our friends to place their faith and hope in Him with whom there is everlasting strength.

THE DYING PATRIARCH.

GEN. XLVIII. XLIX.

Yet mortal life is sad ;
Perpetual storms molest its sullen sky,
And sorrows, ever rife,
Drain the sacred fountain dry.
Away with mortal life !
But hail the calm reality,
The seraph Immortality !

H. K. WHITE.

WHAT subject is more interesting or impressive than death ? It is a solemn event that concerns us all—a change which mankind must universally undergo. In whatever situation men may be placed, whatever station they may fill, whatever riches or honours they may possess, they cannot be exempted from his stroke. And what is death ? It is that which benumbs all our faculties, stops the blood in its progress, and commands the machine of life to stand still ; it is that which separates us from the scenes we loved, from the dearest and tenderest connexions we

have formed, and shuts our eyes and our hearts against all that we see ; it is that which, leading us from a world of changes, introduces us to the awful bar of Jehovah, there to hear our unchanging and eternal destiny. And, surely, a subject so supremely important, and so profoundly interesting, ought to occupy much of our thoughts, and excite the most serious inquiries as to our prospects hereafter. But alas ! though we are surrounded by shadows which are rapidly fleeing away, and are travelling to a world of realities that shall remain for ever the same, our hearts dwell on the present scenes, and almost forget the future. The subject of death, nay the very *sound* of it, is banished from the circles of polite society ; but alas ! the event must happen, to the high as well as to the low ; and though they may refuse to reflect on his approach, they cannot hinder his progress or ward off his stroke. Surely then it becomes us more frequently to dwell on the thoughts of this great change, and to anticipate the arrival of this mighty enemy ; having our lamps trimmed, that we may not be taken at unawares, and our loins girt about with truth, ready to engage in the solemn conflict. And especially should this be the case when we observe that the subject is so frequently introduced, and occupies so prominent a place in the

sacred volume. We may rest assured that if we cannot bear to contemplate death at a distance, there is something about us awfully wrong, and indeed that we are unprepared for his nearer approach.

Though death was originally inflicted on the human race as a punishment on account of sin, it is in some instances overruled, and converted into a blessing. The best of men, with one or two exceptions, have submitted to its stroke; but in their case it has been a deliverance from sorrows and from pains, and an introduction to a world where all is joy and happiness. The same event, as to the fact and agony of dying, happens to the righteous and the wicked, but the consequences of death in the two cases are infinitely different: the one is removed to a world of immortal joys; the other falls into the regions of eternal despair.

The various events in the life of the venerable Jacob were interesting and instructive. We see in his character a mixture both of excellences and defects of no common order; in his state, a series of trials and of comforts that occur in the history of but few men; and in his general experience we have a most lively and impressive commentary on his own words, when in reply to the question of Pharaoh, "How old art thou?"

he says, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of my life been." But the scene is now to close, and the sorrows of his life are to have an end. Conducted by the inspired writer, let us visit his dying bed, hear his last sentiments, listen to his closing prayer, and mark the spirit with which he exchanges worlds. The death of a man who for a long series of years has received peculiar mercies at the hands of God, must be instructive; let us learn the lessons it is adapted to teach,—let us behold the advantages of religion in the article of death,—let us see his eyes closed upon all sublunary objects, and follow in imagination the disembodied spirit to the throne of God.

In reading his life, as recorded by Moses, it would appear, that for several years before his death he had little to do with the world: the temporal affairs of his family he probably left to be settled by his sons, while he fixed more intently his thoughts on the immortal state that was now opening to his view. It is lamentable when we see old men, tottering on the verge of eternity, all anxiety about the concerns of time, and careless in reference to that world between which and them there is but a single step. Happily for Jacob, the grace of God had taught

him better. In an interview with Joseph, he caused him to swear that he would lay his bones in the same tomb with those of Abraham and Sarah, and the rest of his beloved connexions, as having already made his grave there, and being like them desirous of inhabiting the land of promise; and having been assured that this should be the case, he bowed on the head of his bed, blessing the God of his mercies for such a prospect, and for a son so willing to fulfil his desires.

Not long after this, his last illness overtook him; his bodily and mental powers rapidly failed, and indications were given that the end of mortality was at hand. The whole family were filled with anxious forebodings: every one began to review his conduct towards his dying parent; and many a tear started from the eyes of some of his sons, as their memories placed before them the many acts of disobedience they had committed, and the many instances of unkindness they had shewn him. The period of separation from our friends should lead us to reflection, and to repentance on account of our improprieties; while it should be our wish to administer to their comfort as long as they may be spared to us, and to smooth their dying pillows as they depart hence. Such was the conduct of Jacob's sons towards

him : whatever might have been the previous conduct of some of them, they now felt as it became them to feel.

The affecting intelligence of his father's illness was soon conveyed to Joseph, his beloved son, who, though he was full of business, and surrounded with the cares of a mighty kingdom, at once resolved to shew the regard he possessed for a parent who had ever been eminently concerned for his welfare. And because he would teach his beloved sons Manasseh and Ephraim the worth of true religion by example as well as by precept, and that they might have the dying prayers and blessings of their venerable grandfather, he took them with him. It is well for young persons to attend the bed of death, as it reads them an impressive lecture on their mortality ; and especially is it desirable they should visit the last scenes of those who have long tasted the grace of God, as they learn here in a most delightful manner the value of genuine religion, in supporting the mind under the agonies of dissolution, and enabling the soul without dismay to enter on the conflict with the last enemy, secure of the victory, though in the struggle he may lay down his life. Oh! there is something infinitely superior to anything that earth can give, when the aged Christian, with a soul full

of the calm peace of Heaven, can sing with our poet,

Then, while ye hear my heart strings break,
How sweet my minutes roll !
A mortal paleness on my cheek,
And glory in my soul !

Let us draw near, with his children, to the bed of the dying patriarch. One hundred and forty-seven years has he lived in our world ; during that period he has found the path of life to be chequered with pleasures and disappointments. His observation and experience must have qualified him to give us many an important lesson. For a large portion of this period he has known the religion of his fathers ; he has practised its duties, exemplified its spirit, and enjoyed its privileges ; and he is now able to tell us how far its promises have been realized, and how great a blessing it is to the soul of its possessor. Often has he been surrounded by the temptations of Satan and the snares of the world : at some times he has been drawn aside by them from the path of duty ; and, at others, he has been enabled to resist them. Let us learn from him the evil effects of sin, and how by faith and prayer we may overcome the attacks of our enemies. He is just about to enter an eternal world ; its solemn realities are rapidly opening to his

view, and we may therefore rest on his words, as those of truth and soberness. Where, then, can we go to learn more impressive and important lessons than we can acquire at the bed of the dying saint?

When the beloved Joseph enters the chamber of his venerable father, he finds him confined to his bed, and rapidly hastening to his last hour; but while the powers of his body decay, the feelings of his soul towards God and eternal realities are all lively. Religion survives every other interest: it prospers even in old age, and administers consolation when the world retires, unable to bless its possessor. It has been known to flourish when the man in whose heart it has taken up its residence has forgotten all the circumstances of his life, and has ceased to know his nearest connexions. Who can listen to the language of Jacob, as he reviews the divine dealings with him and his family, without weeping? One subject that occupies his thoughts, is the goodness of God towards him. He seems here to enter on the work of reviewing and praising God for his mercies, a task which shall employ him throughout eternity in the heavenly world. How ardent his gratitude, as he speaks of the appearance of Jehovah to him at Luz, where he blessed him, and gave him the land of Canaan;—how

does he admire the Divine goodness, which, when he had given up all expectations of seeing his beloved Joseph again, had not only brought him to his dying pillow, but also his children with him ;—with what pleasure does he remind them of the fact, that though he died, God would be with them, and bring them to the promised land ;—what gratification does it administer to his mind, that he was calmly leaving the world in the midst of his children, and that the salvation he had long waited for was nigh at hand ! O, how different this to the departure of an infidel !—the man who, from the consciousness of impending punishment for his crimes, shrinks from the thought of appearing before his omniscient and all-powerful Judge. The review of his life is awfully painful, and the anticipation of another world unspeakably distressing.

But while Jacob manifests his gratitude for the benefits God has conferred upon him, he shews himself considerably affected with a review of his trials. He touches with exquisite tenderness on the affecting manner in which he lost his beloved Rachel,—hints at his long bereavement of Joseph, and weeps over the sins of his sons, Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. The happy residence of seventeen years in Egypt has not effaced the recollection of these trials from his mind, and

he mentions them both to shew the sorrow they have given him, and to remind his children that trials must be expected to attend their path. Venerable man ! thy sorrows are nearly over : another struggle, and thou shalt take of them an eternal farewell. One thing only could administer pain to the dying servant of God ; and this was, that he died not in the land of promise, but among strangers : but on this subject he is comforted by remembering that it matters little where good men die, seeing that God will be with them, to conduct them through the short valley which separates the church of God on earth from the Mount Zion above. Besides this, the patriarch has his children around him, and possesses the assurance that his remains shall be conveyed to the land of Canaan, and laid among his beloved connexions, while his soul, before that can occur, shall have joined their pure and happy spirits, in a purer and happier world.

Again, we remark, how lovely and impressive the death-bed of a true believer ! and in what an amiable light does it place the religion of the gospel, which scatters the shades of death, and “brings life and immortality to light ;” which bears up the soul above the world, and gives heavenly joys before he leaves the earth !

Before we quite forsake our clay,
And drop this heavy load,
The wings of love bear us away
To see our smiling God.

Oh, that when we come to die, the God of Jacob may be our God, and that the consolations of religion may be enjoyed by us.

It was the opinion of the ancients, that when men approached the confines of death, the future scenes through which their successors were to pass were revealed to them. This doctrine was probably derived from the fact, that some of the patriarchs were favoured with the spirit of prophecy, and were enabled to foretel future events. Certain it is, that Jacob and some others had such a spirit; and while he affectionately prayed for his children, and gave them his dying benediction, he disclosed to them the character of their descendants, and the leading events which should befall them down to the end of time. It might be pleasing and instructive to illustrate the prophecies in reference to each of them, and shew how remarkably they have been fulfilled; but as it would be foreign to my design in these papers, and would occupy a considerable space, I shall content myself with simply referring my reader, who wishes to investigate the subject, to "*Saurin's Dissertations, Historical, Critical, &c.*" Diss. xli. ;

and to "*Bishop Newton's Dissertations on the Prophecies*," Diss. iv. ; where he will be gratified by tracing the connexion between prophecy and Providence.

We ought not, however, to omit the remark, that while he was thus uttering his prophecies, he felt his great weakness of body ; and imagining that death was suddenly coming upon him, he turned from the task he was pursuing, and, directing his eyes and his heart to heaven, exclaimed, " I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord : " by which he expressed his faith in the testimony of God, not only as to the temporal blessings he would confer on his family, but especially as to the coming of the Messiah, to whom he looked, as every guilty sinner must do, and in whose name he trusted for salvation and eternal life. O, how happy the man who can adopt this language as his own !—who delays not the concerns of his soul till he comes to a dying pillow, but is enabled, when he takes a review of his life, to characterize it as a continued waiting for the salvation of God ! And how suitable a work is prayer for the believer to die engaged in ! as he lives, so should he die, praying for pardon through the atonement of the great Messiah : thus is he fitted to enter on the still more delightful task of praise for the mercies he has received. Nor can we refrain

from admiring the spirit of affection which Jacob continues to the last to manifest for his children, and the concern he shews for their enjoyment of spiritual good. Their temporal welfare was a matter of small importance, compared with the spiritual favours he had enjoyed as the servant of God, and with which he must of necessity be anxious that others should be blessed. Religion refines and expands the heart, and leads its possessor to bind up the spiritual interests of others with his own. David on a dying bed prayed for the welfare of Solomon, and for the spread of the Messiah's glory throughout the earth.

Having thus discharged the last duties which devolved upon him, and breathed forth the desires of his heart to God, the sacred writer tells us that, "he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered to his people." With what composure does he lay himself down ; death to him only resembles a kind and gentle slumber ; or rather, while death passes over him as a sleep, it really introduces him to the world of glory ; where he meets such of his family, who, having been made perfect in holiness, have already been introduced into the paradise of God ; while his body shall be laid by the side of his friends, and his dust shall mingle with theirs till the morning of the resurrection.

How painful must be the task to the affectionate Joseph, to close the eyes of such a father ! And what a loss must the death of such a man be to his family and the public at large ! His prayers and his counsels would be lost. The righteous would be deprived of many encouragements which his recitals of instances of the Divine goodness towards him used to impart, and would often be ready to sink into despondency ; while the wicked would be without the restraints which his presence imposed, and would more frequently fall into the sins against which he warned them. Jacob had wept when he supposed Joseph to be dead, and his children may well indulge their grief when he is really so. Methinks I see Joseph falling on his father's neck, and, kissing him, bidding farewell to the delightful intercourse he had enjoyed with him till the morning of the resurrection, when it shall be all renewed. Happy indeed are those persons, who, possessing an interest in HIS favour, who is " the resurrection and the life," can look forward with holy confidence to the period of his second advent, in the sweet expectation of resuming their connexion with their beloved friends, who lived to him on earth, and died to see him in all his glory, as seated on his heavenly throne.

It is, however, a very pleasing thought, that

while the Supreme Being is removing one of our friends after another to the world of spirits, he himself lives, and is ever ready to repair our losses, and to raise up other friends in the room of those he has taken from us. We often hear of the death of eminent men, who occupied important stations in the world and the church, and we are told that their removal inflicts an irreparable loss; but is this true? Is not the residue of the Spirit with God? Does not he continue to live? Cannot he raise up other instruments to do his work as effectually as those whom he takes away? And does he not in fact do so? Was there ever a period when his cause stood still for want of instruments to carry it on? His power is infinite, and his grace is boundless; why then should we indulge in despair?

The Egyptians were very celebrated for the art of embalming the bodies of their friends; so that their very features should long be recognised, and their forms continue uninjured for many centuries. It is probable that a sort of necessity first led to this practice among them. On account of the Nile so frequently inundating a very large portion of their country, the bodies of their friends would be washed away; hence they devised means to preserve them from putrefaction: in which case they frequently preserved them

even in their own houses. This was at once a token of respect to the dead, and a matter of gratification to the living. Jacob was embalmed by Joseph's physicians ; and after the usual period for making preparations was elapsed, the family set out with the corpse to their beloved country.

It appears that at the period in which these events occurred, the attendants of an eastern monarch never appeared before him in garments of mourning ; probably, one great reason for which was, that royal personages might not be reminded of death till it came upon them. Ah ! what a proof is this that all is not right, when a man dare not contemplate his end ! How different to the case of him who can say, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." Under these circumstances, Joseph requested the courtiers around Pharaoh to state to him the circumstances in which he was placed ; that his father having a high regard for the burying place of his fathers in the land of Canaan, had caused him to swear that he would carry him there, and that he therefore solicited permission to be absent a period long enough to discharge his sepulchral duties. Pharaoh, both from a sense of propriety, and from feelings of respect to Jacob and the family, sent the message to Joseph, "Go up and bury thy

father, according as he made thee swear." The Egyptian monarch, though a heathen, saw the importance of Joseph fulfilling his oath. How forcibly does he thus reprove some professing Christians, who seem to consider it a matter of indifference whether or not they complete their engagements.

We see, then, the corpse of the patriarch moving with funeral honours towards the spot where it is destined to rest, till the trumpet of the archangel sounds, and he shall rise to immortality. He once contemplated being bereaved of his children, or, at least, of those whom he loved best; but we see that they all attend him to his last home, drop the tear of grief over his loss, while Joseph, whom he long considered to have been devoured by wild beasts, gives a strong charge that his bones might lie with those of his father. Little did Jacob once think that he should be followed to the grave by a great number of Pharaoh's household; but such was their esteem for the man whom, as a shepherd, they counted an abomination, that they left their pleasures to accompany his remains to the tomb, and to weep over them. Religion compels men to esteem those who exemplify the spirit and conduct it recommends.

My reader has long ago been ready to exclaim,

“Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his ;” but let him be reminded, that if his death is to resemble that of the patriarch, so must his life. Jacob’s was a life of faith ; he believed what God had spoken, and trusted for salvation in the Messiah whom God had promised ; and unless we do the same, we cannot enjoy happiness or heaven. It is a matter of thankfulness, that to us the way of salvation is so much clearer than to the patriarchs. They had the testimony of God to rely on, it is true, but they knew but little beyond the mere fact, that Christ should come, to bring in an everlasting righteousness and salvation for them ; but on us the full blaze of the gospel has shone, and awful indeed will be our condition if we shut our eyes and hearts against it.

The scripture account of the death of Jacob teaches us that it is profitable to attend the dying beds of true saints ; because here we see the importance and excellence of true religion, and how it takes away the fear of death, and enables us to triumph over it, by shewing us “the path of life,” and the seat of Him in whose “presence is life, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” It exhibits Joseph in a very amiable light, as continuing his most affectionate regards to his father, though raised by Divine Pro-

vidence to a very eminent station in the world. It teaches us that we may indulge the liveliest hopes in reference to those who sleep in Jesus, and that we may anticipate the triumphs of the resurrection with delight, because then we shall meet those whom we loved on earth. And, finally, it suggests the importance of examining ourselves, as to our spiritual condition before God. It is not enough for us to profess an attachment to religion ; we must love its glorious Author, and be strongly impressed with its influence.

My reader, forget not that thou also must die ; therefore, PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD.

THE FOUNDLING.

EXOD. II.

With what compassion, with what angel sweetness,
She bends to look upon the infant's face !
She takes his little hand in hers—he wakes—
She smiles upon him—hark ! alas ! he cries ;
Weep on, sweet babe ! weep on, till thou hast touch'd
Each chord of pity, waken'd every sense
Of melting sympathy, and stol'n her soul.

H. MORE.

Few things are more humbling to the pride of man than his being a creature of entire dependence. He cannot, without the aid of others, enjoy the conveniences or the comforts of life. No other creature comes into the world in a state so completely helpless. How admirably does this arrangement of infinite wisdom call forth and illustrate the fine and tender feelings of parental affection ! Nor does it less shew us the benevolence of Jehovah, whose “tender mercies are over all his works ;” for in infancy, and in after-life, he delivers us from “deaths oft.” How great is

his goodness towards us, even when we are totally insensible of his character, and before a single prayer has ascended from our hearts, imploring his protection and favour! It is a circumstance worthy of our remark, that the Lord Jesus was preserved in infancy in a miraculous manner from the rage of a cruel tyrant, who, in order to ensure his destruction, commanded all the infants of Bethlehem to be slain. But he who sitteth in the heavens, superintending the affairs of the universe, laughed at the decree, and delivered his Son from the power of his enemy. This event was typified by the preservation of Moses from the designs of Pharaoh, the sanguinary monarch of Egypt. Mortified at the increase of the Israelites, whose numbers had multiplied, notwithstanding all his schemes to the contrary, he decreed that every male child born among them should be thrown into the river. This was the period when Moses, who was destined to deliver his nation from the power of Pharaoh, came into the world, and was rescued by the good providence of God, in a most remarkable manner, from a watery grave. On this deliverance, which he has recorded with inimitable simplicity and beauty, it is our present design to make a few remarks.

The parents of Moses, Amram and Jochebed,

were among those who were Israelites indeed, and were looking for the period when the God of their fathers should deliver them, according to his promise, from the slavery they now endured. Great, indeed, were the sorrows with which they were exercised. The tender mother was called to see her darling son carried from her breast, to be consigned to the merciless waters of the Nile, there to be devoured by the crocodile, the native of that river. Oh, what anxiety would agitate the breast of the Israelitish female, when looking forward to the interesting yet critical hour of nature's sorrow, let the offspring of her womb should prove a son ! The very blessing which every mother wished to possess, in this case added an almost intolerable burden to their miseries. What a temptation was this to think hardly of the blessed God. Their enemies, the Egyptians, who were devoted to the service of idols, had none of these sorrows ; while they, the descendants of Abraham, the friend of Jehovah, must endure the grief of having their helpless sons torn from their affectionate embraces, and thrown into the river. Instead of the mother rejoicing "that a man child was born," it would only increase her sorrows. Here, indeed, was a trial of their faith, and their patience ;—here was a dark cloud which eclipsed their hopes, and led

them to prefer their petitions at the footstool of Divine mercy with increasing ardour.

When Moses was born, his parents saw he was a beautiful and promising child. There seems to have been something more than usually prepossessing in his appearance ; and, as God had graciously promised them deliverance from their captivity, they probably felt a strong impression on their minds that he was the promised deliverer of his people : for the apostle tells us, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, that “by *faith*, Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child ; and they were not afraid of the king’s commandment.” Three long months, notwithstanding the stern decree of the monarch, did they conceal the lovely babe in their own house. What anxious feelings must agitate the breast of the affectionate Jochebed during this period ! Every one who approached their humble dwelling would be viewed with suspicion, lest he should betray the secret ; every smile of the unconscious infant would be a pang inflicted on her heart, because it would remind her of the untimely death to which he was doomed, and to which she feared he must soon fall a victim ; and every cry he uttered would excite her trembling dread, lest his hiding-place should be discovered, and he, by some cruel and

malicious neighbour, should be torn from her arms! Would not the tender mother be ready to ask—Where is the Lord God of Israel? Why does he suffer us to endure these painful privations, which are infinitely more trying than all our bondage? Why bless me with a son, and thus snatch him from my arms, and wring my heart with grief?—But, then, under the influence of holy principles, she would check her unbelieving fears, and resolve to trust Jehovah, even where she could not trace his deep and mysterious designs.

But, alas! when three months had passed away, the parents of Moses, much as they loved him, found it impossible any longer to conceal the interesting babe. How, then, will the anxious mother act? Say, ye tender mothers, who weep at the very idea of her situation, what would ye have done? A little basket, that would float on the water, is prepared, and pitched within and without; and in this frail bark the infant is placed. Miriam, his sister, an interesting girl, of probably ten or twelve years old, is employed to place the ark on the water, and to watch at a little distance what will become of it. “Who knows,” asks the feeling mother, whose anxiety has now reached its utmost height, “but that in some way or other, I know not how, the God of

our fathers may rescue him from destruction ! Take him, my Miriam, and O, that he who formed him in the womb may have mercy upon him ; consign him to the river, and watch till thou seest him sink to its bottom, or till he be devoured by the crocodile ; or, if such should be his happy lot, till he be rescued from their perilous grasp."

I will not attempt to describe to my reader the feelings of the mother or of the sister on this unhappy occasion ; nor will I try to convey an idea of the agonies endured by the affectionate father, who, as he performed the task of a slave, could not be ignorant of the passing scene. They may be conceived of, but cannot be portrayed. Long had the good man pleaded with God, both in his private retirement and at the family altar, that his Moses "might live before him ;" and even now, in the dark hour of sorrow, he will trust in his God. The magicians of Egypt, celebrated as they were, for their astonishing powers, could not save him ; but the God of Israel "is wonderful in counsel, and mighty in working," and who can tell, asks the believer in his word, but he, who at the last moment appeared for the deliverance of Isaac, may deliver Moses also ?

See, on yonder undulating wave, floats the ark, composed of bulrushes ; on the neighbouring hill stands Miriam, in torturing suspense :

She wonders where the scene will end.

Yonder comes a party of females. It is Thermutis, the daughter of the monarch, with her attendants. The religious system of her country has commanded its votaries to wash their bodies four times in every twenty-four hours. To obey this requisition, and to promote her health and spirits, she is come down to the river to bathe. As she amuses herself in the refreshing stream, the little bark arrests her attention; her curiosity is excited, and she commands it to be brought to her. With feelings hitherto unknown to her bosom, she opens it. Ah! little did she think, that he who hath the hearts of all men in his hands had touched the secret springs of her soul, and was now leading her to perform his pleasure. "And when she had opened it, she saw the child, and the babe wept." Had it felt the cravings of hunger,—had its fears been excited by the peculiarity of its situation,—or did the God of nature design that it should thus appeal to the feelings of the princess? "And she had compassion on him, and said, 'This is one of the Hebrews' children.'" She did not again consign him to the waves; but probably, in heart at least, blamed the cruelty of her father in issuing a decree for the death of harmless and inoffensive infants.

She was, perhaps, the only individual in the empire possessed of the power to do it, who would have felt disposed to save this lovely infant from a watery grave. Little did she suppose that she was about to train up a child who should redeem the Israelites from their slavery, and prove the means of the destruction of thousands of the Egyptians.

At the moment that the compassion of Thermutis is excited by the cry of the babe, little Miriam introduces herself to the notice of the princess; and hearing her remark that the child belonged to one of the Hebrews, she proposes to call an Hebrew woman to nurse it. In almost every other instance suspicion would at once have been excited; but this does not appear to have been the case on this occasion, for the wisdom of Jehovah had planned and his agency transacted the whole of this affair. No Egyptian could have imbued his tender mind with the knowledge of God, or have instilled the leading facts of revelation into his heart. "Mothers," said an old bishop, "can do great things;" and there can be no doubt that the education Moses received from his mother was eminently useful to him in his after days. While his parents were bountifully provided for by the royal house, Moses was loaded with the honours of the Egyptian court, and fitted

for the important part he was hereafter to act on the great theatre of life.

O, what a source of gratitude was this to the mother of Moses ! She never could forget her obligations to God for his kindness to her son. What a tale of delight for his father, when he returned from the slavish toils of the day ! Instead of hearing the melancholy tale that his son was no more, he found him still smiling on his mother's knee ; while she, weeping for joy, told the wonderful dealings of God, and called upon him to join her in a song of thanksgiving to their heavenly Father ; nor can we suppose that Miriam, young as she was, could see all this unmoved. She probably learned now, more clearly than she had ever done before, the blessedness of trusting in God, and sang, with her parents, the praises of him whose wonderful works she afterwards declared in her beautiful and immortal song.

The narrative, as we have now viewed it, teaches us the doctrine of a particular providence which God exercises towards his own people ; as Bishop Hall has remarked, “ when we seem most neglected and forlorn in ourselves, then is God most present, most vigilant.” This encourages us to put our trust in him under the darkest dispensations with which we may be visited ; see-

ing that what may appear to us the greatest trials may end in our unspeakable happiness.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

We learn farther, that the enemies of God, even against their inclinations, may be constrained to do good to his people, and to contribute essentially to their happiness and their usefulness. And, finally, we see the importance of infusing, in early life, the important truths of revelation into the minds of our children. That instruction was imparted to Moses in the years of infancy which preserved him amidst the temptations of an Egyptian court, and prepared him for eminent usefulness in the church of God. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."

THE WISE CHOICE.

EXOD. II. III. HEB. XI. 24--26.

Suffering with gladness for a Saviour's sake,
His soul exults, hope animates his lays,
The sense of mercy kindles into praise,
And wilds, familiar with a lion's roar,
Ring with ecstatic sounds, unheard before :
'Tis love like his that can alone defeat
The foes of man, or make a desert sweet.

COWPER.

WHETHER we search the records of sacred or profane history, it would be difficult to select, with the exception of "the man Christ Jesus," a more remarkable individual than Moses. Whether we consider his talents, natural and acquired,—his superiority as a legislator,—the public spirit he manifested, and the anxious concern he shewed for the prosperity of Israel,—or the meekness of temper he usually displayed, we are impelled to the conviction that he was no common character. On his preservation in helpless infancy,—his happiness in communing with God "face to face, as

a man talketh with his friend,"—his eminence as a type of the great Deliverer and Legislator of the church,—and his remarkable death and burial, we dwell with interest profound and delightful ; while, with Stephen, we pronounce him a man "mighty in words and deeds."

Few portions of the sacred writings suggest reflections more pleasing than the one in which Paul, in writing to the Hebrews, details the influence of faith on the heart and conduct of Moses,—"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter ; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season ; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt : for he had respect unto the recompence of reward."

In reading this passage, our imagination is conducted to the court of Egypt. Here, where royalty dwells in splendour, possessing more than heart could wish,—where idolatry is practised, and from whence has issued many an edict to persecute and oppress the people of Jehovah—here dwells Moses, a man snatched in infancy, by the daughter of the monarch, from a watery grave, and adopted into the royal house as her own son—Moses, who had been instructed in "arithmetic, geometry, physic,

music, hieroglyphics, and astronomy," sciences for which Egypt at that period was justly celebrated. Besides this, he no doubt filled high offices in the state; and probably was, as some of the Jewish writers tell us, designed by Pharaoh himself to be the future sovereign of the country. If ever man had reason to be satisfied with the present world, it was Moses. Possessed of influence and of honour, and able to enjoy every gratification which a man in his high station could wish to pursue, what could be more desirable than that "he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good."

But happiness consists not in splendour, nor is it necessarily connected with it. The royal couch may be planted with thorns; and an aching heart may reside in a palace. While the ignorant and inexperienced may be coveting the pomp and circumstance of a crown, he who sustains it may be groaning under the load which oppresses his mind. Elevated as was Moses in the house of Pharaoh, a burden hangs on his soul which none can remove but the God of Israel. The religion taught by Jehovah, and inspired by the Holy Spirit, and that alone, can make a man truly happy. Forty years long has Moses been seeking for enjoyment in a palace, but he finds it not; it is imparted only by "the

God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," and by him it is given to every believing applicant.

It is a pleasing fact, that religion is occasionally found where we have not supposed it to exist. We should not have looked for Christians in the household of Nero ; nor should we have expected that Moses, the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, would receive Divine light, and feel the importance of the truth. But, removed as such persons generally are from God, and ignorant as they almost universally appear of the great things of the gospel, he, whose ways are not as our ways, and whose thoughts are not as our thoughts, can visit them by his Spirit, and "shine into their hearts to give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." And though it is true "that not *many* wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called" by Divine grace, yet *some* are visited by "the day-spring from on high," and qualified for important offices in his church. But for the sovereign grace of God, Moses had contentedly revelled in the splendid pleasures of the Egyptian court, engaged in the sin of idolatry, and united with the ruling tyrant in his oppression of the Israelites. But God had marked him for his own, and in his due time inclined him to adopt the resolution we have already referred to.

The parents of this distinguished individual, Amram and Jochebed, appear to have been among the number of those who "called on the name of the Lord," believed his promises to the fathers, and were influenced by his fear. As Moses, by the overruling providence of God, had been brought up, in childhood at least, under their eye, they, no doubt, had instructed him in the language and religion of his fathers. He had been told that the Israelites were now in Egypt by the appointment of Jehovah, who by this event was accomplishing his great purposes ; that they should ultimately be delivered from their slavery ; and possibly these pious persons had endeavoured to stimulate him to use exertions to accomplish this desirable object. He had been farther told, that the land of Canaan should be given them for a possession ; and that the great Messiah promised to the fathers, should be born of their nation, should instruct them in the knowledge of God, and redeem them from spiritual slavery by the shedding of his blood. The Spirit of God impressed these truths on his heart : he believed them ; and placing a simple reliance on those important facts, his views, his feelings, and his conduct were changed.

Believers in the religion of the Bible have often been charged with enthusiasm. But why ?—

Have those who prefer the charge examined the matter ; and is there ground on which it is supported ? The faith of the Christian has regard to the testimony of God. Jehovah had revealed the truths which Moses believed. See Gen. xv. 13—19 ; xviii. 8, 9, 13 ; xxii. 18 ;—and where, we ask, is the enthusiasm—where the irrationality of believing the word of him who made us ? Awful, indeed, must be the condition of those who live and die rejecting the testimony God hath given of his Son.

Where the faith of the gospel has been produced in the heart by the influence of the Holy Spirit, it will not be concealed as a hidden principle. It is a light that cannot be hid ; it is leaven that must produce effects ;—a fire that must burn ;—a seed that must grow and produce fruit—*it works by love*. When a man believes what God has revealed, he must of necessity venerate his Creator, both on account of the loveliness of his character and the grace displayed in his conduct : and having loved God, he will love his people also ; because they bear the image of their common Father, and are constantly seeking the promotion of his glory. Besides which, Jesus has made it the test of our Christian character that we should love the brethren who, with us, have been begotten again “by the word of truth.”

Hence we are not surprised at the resolution of Moses to connect himself with "the people of God." They alone possess the knowledge of Jehovah ; they are looking forward to the land of promise, and they are hoping for the appearance of the Messiah. And if there are so many reasons why he should unite with them,—why should he, or they who act like him, be charged with enthusiasm ?

But if a man would enjoy the blessings of religion, he must be content to make expensive sacrifices. Moses sees the Israelites despised and persecuted ; they are in bondage, while he possesses liberty, and is surrounded with plenty and with grandeur. But the faith he possesses *overcomes the world* ; it triumphs over the principles of earth, and pities the motives which influence its votaries ; it smiles at the sufferings which man inflicts, and despises the offers which the world presents ; it has in possession rich promises to support the mind in the hour of trial, and in prospect the enjoyment of immortal felicity. Must Moses cease "to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,"—this is a sacrifice he is quite willing to make ; for he becomes by faith a son of Jehovah—he belongs to the family of heaven, and from henceforth he holds communion with the Governor of the universe ; pouring into the

bosom of Deity all his sorrows, and receiving from his infinite love the supply of all his necessities. Must he "suffer affliction with the people of God,"—he is content to do so ; because they are the favourites of heaven : he is quite sure that the path of duty is the path of safety, and must eventually conduct to everlasting happiness. Their common Father will always provide for them ; and though he may now suffer them to endure trials and afflictions, it is but to furnish him with an opportunity of administering grace, to support their minds, and to prepare them for a residence in that land where these sorrows and this bondage shall be unknown. Must he renounce "the pleasures" in which he had engaged ?—Yes ; and all these he cheerfully leaves ; he knows they are all impure—they are "the pleasures of sin ;" and what must be the nature of the enjoyment of him who lives in a state of rebellion against God, whose heart is alienated from his Maker ? His happiness cannot be genuine ; for this is the portion only of him who has been reconciled to God by the death of his Son. Moses felt also that these pleasures are "but for a season ;" they last but a very short time, are accompanied with dissatisfaction, and end in sorrow. Like David, of after times, Moses would rather spend a day in the service of

God, than a thousand elsewhere. Has he to suffer reproach? He has; but he esteems "the reproach of Christ," or his sufferings for faith in the Messiah to come, "greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." O what a different view does the word of God give us of the wealth of this world from that which men generally entertain! Man considers it as all-important; Jehovah represents it as of but little value. Man pursues the world at the expense of his own salvation; while God teaches us, that even the reproach attendant on religion is to be preferred before the best things which earth has to give. Moses was aware of the persecutions he would have to suffer; and he knew also the glory of him for whose sake they would be endured. He was not ignorant of the sneers with which he would be assailed; but he felt the excellence of the cause in which he had engaged, and knew that a period would arrive when the wisdom of his conduct would appear before the assembled universe. He knew, even then, that a man could not forsake his all for Christ without receiving "a hundred fold in this world, and in the world to come everlasting life." He saw things in their true colours; and what were the honours, the riches, and the pleasures of Egypt? Would they satisfy the claims of God? Would they ease

a wounded conscience, or heal a broken heart? Would they comfort in the hour of sorrow, or bribe the king of terrors, when he should make his approach?—No : he felt their worthlessness. Besides this, he looked forward ; “ he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.” Not merely did he anticipate the enjoyments of Canaan, for that country he never entered, but he saw by faith that heavenly land of which Canaan, with all its riches, presented but a feeble shadow—“ he looked for a city which hath foundations ; whose builder and maker is God ;” his Father’s house—where he himself dwells, and where the whole family of heaven shall finally assemble ; where Jesus sits enthroned in immortal splendour, scattering around him “ joys unspeakable and full of glory.”

The splendid crown which Moses sought
Still beams around his brow ;
Though soon great Pharaoh’s conquer’d pride
Was taught by death to bow.

What, then, are the treasures of the world, compared with the exalted blessings which the religion of Christ exhibits to our view? All which earth gives is, confessedly, and from its very nature, confined to the present state. Its pleasures end in the night of death—its honours

are buried with us in the grave—its riches pass not current in the world to come. Preparation for that solemn eternity into which death will introduce us, it pretends not to give. It makes no promises beyond the tomb. But Moses, and every one who possesses faith in Christ, must needs regard another world. To the believer in Jesus, eternity opens a vast and delightful prospect. There he sees “the end of his faith, the salvation of his soul.” A deliverance from the pains of hell, the dominion of sin, and the power of death. There he enters on those durable riches, those lasting honours, and those substantial pleasures, which this world, with all its boasting, could never afford him.

And who that reflects on the nature of worldly happiness, and the glories of the world to come,—who that, by the aid of faith, sees “him who is invisible,” can blame Moses for such a choice? What does the man enjoy who to-day occupies the throne of a mighty empire, while thousands bow before him, adopting the fulsome language of flattery, and saying of him, as they did of Herod, “It is the voice of a god, and not of a man?” Is he quite certain, that those who to-day load him with plaudits, may not conspire his death to-morrow? He who has every pleasure at command, does his conscience never whis-

per in his ears that he is a sinner? Does he never feel that the Christian, who in a mud-walled cottage has his "fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ," is a character infinitely more honourable than himself? Does his heart never tell him that all this proud distinction is but a bubble, which will soon burst in disappointment? Will affliction keep at a distance from his throne; and will death listen to his edict, and forget to visit the palace?—No; he is but a man, and must have his share of sorrows. As a guilty rebel before God, he needs the pardon of his sins; and unless that pardon is obtained, he will find that, like other impenitent sinners, he must sink into the regions of despair. Already do the inhabitants of the grave proclaim in his ears, as he passes by their silent dwellings—

Princes, this clay must be your bed,
In spite of all your towers;
The tall, the wise, the reverend head,
Must lie as low as ours.

And what becomes now of the charge of enthusiasm? Or even supposing that a portion of it be possessed by the Christian: it is forgiven in the artist, who exclaimed—"I pant for eternity;" it is pardoned in the statesman, whose heart is anxiously seeking but the temporal prosperity of mankind; it is not censured, nay, it is admired,

in the man of science, who is so attached to his studies as even to forget the common duties of life ;—and is it unpardonable only in the man who, relying on the testimony of God, tramples on the things of this world, because he is expecting, and that on the most rational grounds, soon to enter on a better ? May it not be excused, if, feeling the vast solemnity of eternity, the things of time dwindle in our view into absolute insignificance ; and if, anxiously engaged in preparing for the great change we must soon undergo, we care but little for events which, compared with those that engross our attention, are but like the shaking of a leaf compared with the roaring of the thunders of God ; or the light of a taper in comparison with the rays of the great orb of day, when he shines forth in all his noon-tide splendour !

No longer, then, let the heart of my reader be fixed on the baubles of the present world ; but, filled with sorrow for his past indifference to the concerns of his soul, let him—

Fly to the hope the Gospel gives ;—
The man that trusts the promise lives.

Let his soul no longer be placed on the objects of sense ; but let him aspire after that grace which shall enable him to “set his affections on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right

hand of God." Like Moses, let him heartily cast in his lot with the followers of Christ, cheerfully sharing their sorrows here, and expecting to enjoy their reward hereafter.

The estimate which Moses formed of the vanity of the world on the one hand, and the blessedness of religion on the other, was altogether a correct one. True, he long lived as "a stranger in a strange land," but the Lord never forsook him, and at length promoted him to honour in the sight of many nations. He is immortalized as the deliverer and legislator of Israel ; in answer to his prayers, they were again and again preserved from entire destruction, and though on some occasions he manifested an improper and inconsistent spirit, yet did he generally display that meekness for which he stands so eminently distinguished. True, he was not perfect ;—"to err is human ;" but he with whom is forgiveness, while he chastised him with exclusion from the land of Canaan, was pleased, in a mysterious and happy manner, to remove his soul into the heavenly world, burying his body till the morning of the resurrection, when it shall rise to immortal glory.

We learn from the interesting facts recorded of Moses, that the blessed God selects instruments to carry on his cause in the world from

all classes of society. Moses of Egypt, and Saul of Tarsus, may be trained to oppose his people ; but he can change their hearts, and constrain them to consecrate their mighty energies to his service. He sometimes makes even his enemies contribute to support and deliver his people. Little did Pharaoh imagine, when he issued an edict that the male children of the Hebrews should be destroyed, that it would prove the means of his giving support, and training up one of those very infants, who, in his own court, should acquire the arts of government, and who should deliver the captives from his grasp. So true is it that the Supreme Governor of human affairs can make even "the wrath of man to praise him." We learn further from the history, that there is nothing lost by serving God ; though we may have to sacrifice worldly good, the loss is abundantly made up by the peace of conscience, the serenity of soul, and all the happiness which religion brings. And, finally, we see that faith in God, and a firm and unmovable confidence in his word, will support a Christian under all the trials of life, and enable him "always to triumph in Christ."

O for a strong, a lasting faith,
To credit what th' Almighty saith !
T' embrace the message of his Son,
And call the joys of heaven our own.

THE BLASPHEMER STONED.

LEV. XXIV. 10—16.

He
Whom starry science in her cradle rock'd,
And Castaly enchasten'd with its dews,
Closes his eye upon the holy word,
And, blind to all but arrogance and pride,
Dares to declare his infidelity,
And openly condemn the Lord of hosts.
What is philosophy, if it impart
Irreverence for the Deity, or teach
A mortal man to set his judgment up
Against his Maker's will?

H. K. WHITE.

IN perusing the historical parts of the inspired volume we are frequently struck with the unhappy effects which arose from the people of God associating with those who were yet opposed to him, especially when the union was so close as that which forms the marriage contract. Nothing, surely, can be more inconsistent with religion, or more unlovely, than unions of this kind. The tastes, the pursuits, and the destinies of the friends and the enemies of God are so different,

that, if facts did not convince us to the contrary, we might imagine it impossible that so close an attachment could exist between them. Such, however, is the perverseness of the human heart, that in defiance of the law of God, and in opposition to our own best interests, we determine to gratify our wicked desires. The Supreme Being allows us, in justice, to follow our own devices, but causes "our wickedness to correct us," and teaches us, that "it is an evil thing, and bitter, to forsake the Lord our God." Unhallowed alliances of the kind we have censured destroyed the old world, frequently led the Israelites into sin, and finally drove them into captivity.

Nor have the unhappy effects of this crime been less striking in destroying the happiness of individuals. This sin ruined an Esau, a Sampson, and a Solomon ; and did no small injury to Abraham and Job, to Moses and David. It is an artful snare of Satan, to obstruct the progress of religion in the soul, and it is too often successful ; against it young persons should diligently guard, and, that they "may be kept from the evil," they should ardently pray.

The awful circumstance on which I propose to offer a few illustrative remarks, closely connects itself with the observations just made. While the children of Israel were in Egypt, they

too frequently married into the families of that country, and these marriages were, many of them at least, highly injurious to their future welfare. In the instance before us, an Israelitish female had become the wife of an idolatrous Egyptian, and the fruit of their marriage was a son, who, on the departure of the Israelites for Canaan, accompanied his mother, and perhaps his father, to take possession of the promised land. An event of this sort would doubtless afford pleasure to his mother, who probably imagined that he had thus forsaken for ever the paths of idolatry and of vice, and that, like Moses, their leader, he had "chosen rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." She, no doubt, looked forward to the period when he should enter "the land flowing with milk and honey," and enjoy with her a long period of uninterrupted happiness.

How frequently are the fondest hopes of a pious parent disappointed ! And especially is this the case, when the father, who ought to guide his infant son to the altar of the God of heaven, there to avow allegiance to Him, leads him astray to the paths of vice. Children are far more likely to choose the ways of sin than those of holiness, for the former accord with their natural inclinations, but the latter are opposed to their depraved

passions. This young man had witnessed the idolatry of his father, and knew his opposition and hatred, as an Egyptian, towards the descendants of Israel. So long as his departure from Egypt wore the charms of novelty, so long as he trembled on account of the thunders of Sinai, and so long as he felt but little of the fatigues and inconveniences of the pilgrimage, he probably felt satisfied ; but having to endure hardships, and, possibly, irritated by the conduct of those who would consider him as a suspicious person, he now began to shew himself an open enemy to the commonwealth and to the God of Israel.

It appears that, on some account or other, a quarrel occurred between this young man and an Israelite. It is painfully affecting to see a spirit of opposition among men, who are bound both by the law of God and their own happiness to love each other. Sin, however, has thrown the world into confusion, and leads men to expose themselves to danger, in order to shew their hatred to those who have been so unhappy as to give them offence. These young men not only disputed, but fought. One evil produced another : hard words led to blows, and blows to an excess of passion, which impelled to a still greater crime.

Whoever contemplates the nature and the cha-

racter of Jehovah must feel very deeply impressed with reverence towards him, and must see the wisdom of his law, that his name should be treated with solemnity. It was an amiable feeling which led the Jews to refrain from pronouncing it excepting on extraordinary occasions, and which hardly permitted them even to write it. Talking frequently of Jehovah in a careless way will naturally lead us to think lightly of him. There were those, however, in earlier ages, who could speak of this Great Being as they would have done of an idol deity, and there are too many in our own day who resemble them. The man of whom we are now speaking is generally supposed to have injured the Israelite with whom he fought, and, on this account, to have been taken before a magistrate, who having decided the cause against him, he became irritated, and blasphemed the name of the God of Israel, by whose laws he had now been judged.

Blasphemy has been very correctly defined as speaking contumeliously of Jehovah. Its origin betrays an awfully depraved heart, and its design can be none other than that which Satan himself has in view, to excite low and wicked thoughts in the hearts of men in reference to the Great Jehovah. It is impossible to conceive of any thing more awful than that of a man who owes his ex-

istence and his comforts to God, speaking against the Being who is adored by all holy intelligences, whose word gave existence to the universe, whose favour constitutes heaven, and whose frown creates the misery of hell itself. Well might Jehovah say, in reference to such a crime, that he would not hold the man guiltless who should be found perpetrating it.

May I be allowed, before I proceed, to express a fear that this awful crime of blasphemy against Jehovah is even now very frequently committed ! I allude, not merely to the bold profane swearer, but to the man who indulges and disseminates a low opinion of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has given so many proofs to the world of his essential Deity. To degrade Him whom the Father has exalted ; to count His blood as an unholy thing, or to reckon it as of no value ; to represent Him as a fallible and peccable man like ourselves, and to reject the doctrines He has delivered in the name of Jehovah,—must surely be a crime very nearly akin to that of blasphemy. Let my reader cautiously examine himself as to the views he entertains of the Divine character, and be careful lest he fall into this sin ; remembering that “the Lord God is a jealous God, and will not give his glory to another.”

The laws which emanated from Jehovah for

the government of Israel had declared the enormity of this crime, but had nowhere adjudged its punishment. One would have thought man could hardly have committed it ; but when we daily hear murmurings against his providence, and see his authority defied,—when we see his worship deserted, and idols set up in his room,—when we hear some deny his existence, and others find fault with his law, we learn that the depravity of the human heart, as well as its deceitfulness, is awfully inveterate ; and when we see the Holy and Just One put to death by his creatures, we are compelled to admit that man can blaspheme the name of Jehovah, and it becomes us to be deeply humbled on account of it.

Greatly offended, and deeply grieved as Moses, to whom this case was referred, must be, he felt that it would not become him to inflict a punishment upon the criminal till he had conferred on the subject with the great Being who had been blasphemed. Honest zeal may yet be unenlightened. The disciples of Christ would have called fire down from heaven, to consume those who opposed him, had not he hindered them. We may punish those who sin against God in a wrong spirit, and in a manner which may not accomplish their reformation, or deter others from the sin. It is right that he who is blasphemed

against should ordain the punishment for the crime, because he only can select what infliction should mark his detestation of the sin, and prevent others from readily falling into it. On these accounts, Moses acted with great wisdom in keeping the culprit in a state of confinement till the will of the infinitely wise Lawgiver should be known in reference to him.

It will readily be supposed that the prayer of Moses, on an occasion like this, would not long remain unanswered. Jehovah directs that the offender be brought forth, that the witnesses who heard him utter the awfully criminal language should distinguish him by laying their hands upon his head, that the whole body of the people should unite in stoning him, and that henceforth those who offended in a similar manner should be thus put to death.

Disposed, as we naturally are, to entertain hard thoughts of God, we may be ready to say that this punishment was too severe. A similar idea has been expressed by infidels in reference to Nadab and Abihu, who were destroyed for offering strange fire before the Lord ; the Bethshemites for looking into the ark ; and Uzzah, who put forth his hand to preserve it from falling. But let it be remembered, that in each case there was a direct violation of the Divine law, which

had been given in a manner eminently marked by the greatest solemnity. It is not reckoned a small crime to commit treason against an earthly monarch, even though the offender may be unable to do him an injury, yet the disposition to do that injury is primarily regarded ; and, shall treason against the Majesty of heaven go unnoticed, when the punishment is awarded by Infinite wisdom and justice, to whom the actual guilt of the sinner is perfectly known ? It is unreasonable that a company of rebels should be allowed to dispute the justice of a punishment which they have themselves incurred. By our transgressions we have offended our Maker, and it becomes us at once to acknowledge his equity in our punishment, and to avail ourselves of the privilege he has given us of imploring his mercy.

Sentence having been passed upon the offender by an infallible judge, no time must be lost in putting it into execution. The scene is indescribably affecting. Those who had heard him utter the language, which they trembled to repeat, are called forth with him without the camp, and commanded to lay their hands upon his head ; thus pointing him out as the offender, practically refusing to share his guilt by concealing it from their neighbours, and giving him up to the displeasure of the thousands of Israel.

It is worthy of remark, that this man was not to be put to death by means of any particular person or persons, who should be especially appointed to that painful office ; but it was to be done by “all the congregation.” Did not Jehovah thus call upon Israel, each to testify publicly their abhorrence of this awful sin—to shew an united determination to punish it in those who might hereafter transgress in a similar manner, and to testify against themselves, should they be so unhappy as to fall into the crime? Those who have punished others for a sin, certainly must acknowledge the justice of their own punishment in a similar case. This kind of death was ever after, according to the appointment of Jehovah, inflicted on those who committed this crime ; but it is very deeply to be regretted, that in after times the severity of it extended to those who in the *opinion* of interested persons had been guilty of *constructive blasphemy*. For this the Saviour himself, as well as Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was put to death. It is a dangerous thing to leave the plain dictates of revelation, and to apply the laws of God to cases for which they were never designed. If we once do this, it is difficult to say at what absurdity we may arrive. A wrong view of the laws of heaven has laid the foundation of, by far, the larger proportion of the persecutions which have deluged

the Christian church with blood, and which are now calling for the vengeance of Jehovah upon their authors.

This affecting portion of the holy volume is eminently calculated to impress our minds with the awful extent of human depravity, which will lead us even to curse the author of our being, and the giver of our mercies. It shews us the melancholy result of young persons having bad examples placed before them. It is probable that this young man had heard his father in Egypt curse his idols, when the desires he had presented to them had not been gratified ; and he now applies similar language in reference to the God of Israel, bringing down his wrath upon himself. We see the importance of caution in reference to the connexions we form, seeing that sinners not only bring the vengeance of heaven upon themselves, but scatter misery around the whole circle in which they move. It becomes us, we farther learn, to entertain feelings of the most profound reverence towards God, and to be satisfied with the arrangements of his providence ; because, in some way or other, we shall see the effects of his jealousy, and be punished for our sins. Let each of my readers seek an interest in His favour, through the mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ : for “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

THE SERPENTS.

NUMBERS, XXI.

With fiery serpents greatly pained,
When Israel's mourning tribes complained,
And sigh'd to be relieved ;
A serpent straight the Prophet made
Of molten brass, to view displayed :
The patients looked, and lived !

ANON.

It should ever be the delight of those who are blessed with the powers of reason to review the dealings of the Great Jehovah with mankind in every successive age. Such a retrospect will instruct us in the knowledge of the Divine character, the nature of the claims He makes on our love and obedience, and tend to deliver us from the temptations to which we are exposed from Satan and the world. To assist us in this profitable duty, the God of wisdom and mercy has given us the sacred volume, which we do well to regard as a light shining in this dark world, to lead our feet into the ways of peace.

The events to which we would now invite the attention of the reader, happened in the immediate neighbourhood of Edom, or Idumea, on the borders of the land of Canaan, about the year of the world 2553, nearly forty years after the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, a little before they entered into possession of the land of Canaan, and about one thousand four hundred and fifty-one years before the incarnation of the Messiah.

It will be remembered by our readers, that the Israelites displayed a very awful degree of rebellion against the law and authority of the blessed God ; that they frequently murmured at his government and Providence ; and that, as the consequence, the Divine anger was often manifested against them. To punish them for their sins, and to accomplish other important designs of Jehovah, their stay in the wilderness which lay between Egypt and Canaan was protracted to the very long period of forty years. At the time, however, to which we now have reference, they were brought nearly to the borders of the promised land, and expected to have passed directly through Idumea, and have taken possession of it. But, disappointed by Infinite Wisdom of their hopes, wearied with their journey, depressed in their spirits, and, above all, under the

influence of Satanic agency, they found fault with the conduct of their heavenly Benefactor, murmured against his servant Moses, and disapproved of the provisions, which he, in a miraculous manner, had given them, without labour on their part, during their long pilgrimage.

It was not to be expected that a Being so holy and powerful as Jehovah, would allow them thus to sin, without manifesting marks of his displeasure. The goodness he had shewn, and the honour he had put upon them in making them his people, would awfully increase their guilt; and we shall now find that his anger was displayed in a way which must have convinced all of the cause of their sufferings, and the inevitable consequences of sin.

The wilderness in which the Israelites now were, according to the accounts furnished us by highly respectable travellers, was, and indeed continues to be, infested by great numbers of serpents, of a brilliant, fiery colour, whose bite produced considerable inflammation, and an acute pain similar to that inflicted by fire, which generally proved fatal to those who were unfortunately wounded by them. The Supreme Being allowed these serpents to increase in great numbers among the people, and to make, by their fatal ravages, many thousands of them monuments of his displeasure.

It would be very difficult for us to form a correct and full idea of the mischief effected by these destructive creatures among a body of several millions of persons. Multitudes rose in the morning in their accustomed health, rejoicing in their connexions, and pleased with the hope of soon surmounting their present trials, and entering the land described to them as flowing with milk and honey. But, alas ! stepping to the door of the tent, perhaps to gather up their allotted portion of manna for the day, or to transact business with an acquaintance, they are bitten by one of these reptiles ; poison is infused into the blood ; the part affected is swollen, and in a very few hours they lie cold and stiff in the arms of death. Thus thousands, and probably tens of thousands, in a very few days, fell victims to an incensed Deity, and proclaimed to future ages, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Who shall describe to us the confusion and sorrow which now universally prevail ? In this tent lies the corpse of a beloved and only child, the hope and solace of its parents ; but it is gone, and they weep, refusing to be comforted : there the bereaved husband is seen bending over the inanimate body of her who but yesterday was the blooming beauty, and the lovely bride ; yonder is the interesting female bedewing with her

tears the lifeless remains of one to whom she, but a few hours ago, hoped to be united for many years to come ; and at a little distance we may see the aged couple, bending under the weight of years, committing the prop of their age to the silent dust ; and as they are engaged in this act, they themselves have the mortal bite inflicted on them. Oh, sin ! how dreadful are thy ravages ! It is easy to bring on ourselves merited punishment ; but, alas ! we cannot dismiss, as we would, the consequences of our transgressions.

It is well when our trials lead us to reflection and humiliation. The Israelites, thus visited with a painful dispensation, losing their beloved connexions, seeing thousands of their kindred changed to corpses, and assured that no human arm could save them, very properly applied to Moses, their leader, and the friend of God. They knew that his prayers had power with Jehovah, they hoped that his mediation with him would now be accepted, and they felt it to be right to acknowledge their sins both against heaven and Moses.

Happily for Israel, Moses was a man eminently distinguished for his meekness ; and when they consulted him he did not reproach them with their past crimes : but seeing proofs of repentance, and feeling an ardent desire for their de-

liverance and happiness, he bowed before the throne of Jehovah, and used his mighty influence in their favour. Nor was his intercession in vain, for the Lord heard, and at once prepared a remedy.

A thousand times has it been seen, that, in order to accomplish his purposes, the Governor of the Universe employs different means to those which would be selected by his creatures. "His ways are not as our ways, neither are his thoughts as our thoughts." We should have supposed that a council would have been convened of those who were most eminent for medical skill, and that their combined wisdom might have discovered some method of cure. But Jehovah resolved on a remedy which in itself possessed no virtue; but which, owing its efficacy solely to its being his appointment, should impress the people with a sense of their entire dependence on Him, and ensure to himself the whole glory of their recovery. Moses was directed to make a serpent of brass, to elevate it on a pole in the midst of the camp, to proclaim that whoever had been bitten might look upon it, and that, though dying, such persons should instantly recover. What a display was this of infinite mercy;—what a remarkable interposition in favour of Israel!

We can easily imagine the suggestions of in-

fidelity on the one hand, and the triumphs of faith on the other, on this occasion. It is quite probable that when the proclamation was made through the camp, some persons would begin to reason on the improbability of the remedy, and would argue—that as looking at a serpent made of brass could possess no medicinal virtue, it could not be the appointment of Jehovah : and it is quite possible that with these views some might refuse to look, and die. Others, however, smarting under excruciating pain, reduced to despair as to all human help, and just ready to expire, would joyfully listen to the declaration of the acknowledged servant of God, would exult in the provision of a remedy so free, simple, and efficacious ; and would earnestly look, and thus derive life. How fondly does the fancy dwell on the happy scenes thus produced, by the blessing of Jehovah, on the means he had appointed for the recovery of his people ! How much happiness would be diffused through numerous families, by the happy recoveries which took place among them ! While the justice of the Deity was manifested by punishing in this awful manner those who rebelled against Him, his mercy was at least equally displayed by the recovery of those who exercise faith in his word.

How striking an illustration does this narra-

tive afford us of the way of salvation by Christ Jesus ! Twice, at least, did the Saviour refer to it in this way ; when he said to Nicodemus, “ As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up ; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life : ” and when he afterwards said to his disciples, “ And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me. ” He is the appointed remedy to whom perishing and dying sinners can alone look for life and salvation ; the way of obtaining mercy is by the belief of the truth concerning him, and placing a simple reliance on his favour ; thousands are found to despise his mercy, and they perish for ever ; others are constrained to look unto him, and they are saved. May it be equally the happiness of the writer and his readers to believe in this great Deliverer, and to experience the blessings of his infinite grace.

THE HYPOCRITICAL PROPHET.

NUMBERS, XXII.—XXIV.

Quit, dark Hypocrisy, thy thin disguise,
Nor think to cheat the notice of the skies !
Unsocial Avarice, thy grasp forego,
And bid the useful treasure learn to flow !
Restore, Injustice, the defrauded gain !
Oppression, bend to ease the captive's chain,
Ere awful Justice strike the awful blow !
And drive you to the realms of night below !

BOYSE.

Few things are more painfully affecting to a rightly constituted mind, than the idea of a man who yet remains an enemy to God, being engaged as a minister in holy things. He who bears messages from Jehovah to man, should have a love to the Being by whom he is sent, and to the message he is honoured to carry. And yet it is greatly to be feared, that many who have been the bearers of blessings to others, have not been partakers of them themselves. Judas published the glories and the grace of Christ, and after all, was lost ; Caiaphas, the Jewish high-priest, declared “ that it was expedient for

one man to die for the people, to gather together in one the people of God, who were scattered abroad;" but we have no reason to conclude, that he shared in the happy effects which resulted from the Messiah's death. Saul was found among the prophets, but retained his evil dispositions; and Balaam, whose history is now briefly to pass under our review, uttered many very important truths, but lived "loving the wages of unrighteousness," and died as an enemy to the divine government.

It appears that, in the earlier ages of the world, when one nation warred against another, they tried in various ways to obtain the favour of their respective idols, and to incense them against their enemies. In order to effect this, they applied to their prophets, and to those who practised the various arts of enchantment. The people of Israel, in their journey towards Canaan, had come into the neighbourhood of Moab, the inhabitants of which united in their opposition to those whom they improperly accounted their enemies. They had heard of the fame of Balaam, though he lived at a considerable distance from them, and they thought it desirable to ensure his services, and to prevail upon him to come and curse the Israelites, thus by his arts of divination to effect their ruin. For this purpose,

according to the usage of that country and age, they despatched messengers conveying presents to him, and intreating him immediately to visit them, to accomplish the object they so ardently desired.

Whether Balaam had, or had not, previously been employed by the blessed God as a true prophet, it would be difficult for us to determine: it is certain that some among the heathen nations had, before this, heard of Jehovah, and had been taught to worship him, and it is not improbable that Balaam had been one of the instruments employed to diffuse that knowledge. If this was the case, his situation must have been a truly melancholy one; having to unfold the character and benevolence of that Being whose favour he had never sought, and whose wrath he should hereafter himself experience. It is certain, however, that if he were a true prophet, he was also a magician, and used arts for the injury of mankind. There are those who destroy the good they might otherwise do, by the evil which forms a prominent part of their character.

It is observable, that a solemn awe, in reference to Jehovah, rested on the mind of Balaam; for ardently desirous, as he evidently was, from the very first, to undertake the business desired by Balak, yet he dared not to do it until he had

consulted, and obtained the permission of the God of Israel, against whom no enchantments could prevail, and whose displeasure could not be withstood. And yet, had the fear of God duly influenced his heart, he would instantly have refused to have accompanied the messengers, to undertake the unholy task, and would have sent them back with a reply, that would have prevented any farther application to him for so unhallowed a purpose. When evil is not heartily resisted, we tempt our enemies to ensnare us into the paths of transgression. We see in Balaam a striking instance of a man's naturally covetous disposition acting in opposition to an enlightened understanding.

Nothing can be more evident than that Balaam had a heart set on the possession of as much of the wealth of this world as possible. This was apparent to the messengers sent by Balak, to effect the destruction of the Israelites. He does not display the noble spirit of an apostle in after days, who, when he was offered money for the bestowment of the remarkable gifts with which he was endowed, replied, "Thy money perish with thee." Balaam regretted that he could not fulfil the requests of the king of Moab; but God had restrained him. Jehovah had blessed his people, and prohibited Balaam from de-

livering a curse which never could be put into execution. If sinners do not more frequently injure the people of God, it is not because they are unwilling to do it, but because they are restrained by the hand of Omnipotence, which is ever engaged in protecting and blessing those who are devoted to his service.

Having learnt something of the disposition of the prophet, and being convinced that he was not averse to the task he would impose upon him, Balak resolves to make another attempt to accomplish his object. And now he would send a larger and more honourable embassy to work upon the pride of Balaam ; he will promise great honours to feed his ambition, as well as immense riches to gratify his covetousness. The supposed good things of the present state are all that the men of the world seek after, and they are greatly disappointed, when Divine Providence seems opposed to their obtaining them. Balaam spoke a truth, which ministered not a little to his mortification, when he declared, that “ if Balak would give him his house full of silver and gold, he could not go beyond the word of Jehovah, to do less or more.” And yet, the temptation now laid before him was so great, that he resolves, if possible, to accomplish the desired end, and possess the promised good. So true is it, that “ they who *will* be rich fall into divers temptations.”

When Jehovah would destroy a sinner, he need not call to the thunderbolts of his vengeance to descend and crush him to atoms ; he has only to allow him to take the consequences of his own ways. Thus, when the Israelites, personified by Ephraim, had fallen into idolatry, he said, "Ephraim is joined to idols ; let him alone ;" that is, let him take the natural results of the sin he has chosen to commit. Balaam was very desirous of being allowed to curse Israel, and of obtaining the honour and wealth which had been offered to him, and God, in displeasure, at length permitted him to gratify his evil desires. It is seldom, however, that Jehovah permits a man to sin without some difficulty. He hedged up the way of idolatrous Israel "with thorns," and imposed upon Balaam a condition in connexion with permission to visit the king of Moab. If the men called him, he might go ; and if he went, he must be content to speak only as the Lord had commanded him. The difficulties in our path, against which we often murmur, are often placed there in mercy, and it would be well, if they more frequently led us to review our ways. We are not surprised that a man so bent on sin as Balaam was, violated the injunction of the Supreme Being, and rose early to depart with the princes of Moab, on the awful errand of cursing Israel.

We see him, then, on his way, probably not a little elated with the thought of the object he had supremely desired being obtained. He had in his view, and already began to enjoy, the honours and the wealth on which his covetous heart was set: he probably calculated on a long life, spent in pomp and splendour, and did not imagine, even for a moment, that all his wishes might end in disappointment. Sinners are apt to indulge in confidence, forgetting, that "He who sitteth on high," can throw their best concerted plans into confusion, and in a moment, blast their finest prospects.

It is really surprising to see how Jehovah interposes obstacles in the way of the transgressor, and how the sinner yet determines to persevere in the way of iniquity. The Divine anger is kindled against the madness of the prophet, "and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary against him." By this angel of the Lord, it is highly probable, we are to understand that exalted personage who afterwards appeared in our world as "the Messenger of the covenant," and who has ever presented the most cogent arguments to mankind why they should refrain from sin. The way he takes to excite the attention of Balaam, and to convey reproof to him, is singularly striking. Balaam, as was customary

in that age and country, even to persons of the highest rank, travelled upon an ass, and was accompanied, not only by the distinguished personages who escorted him to their country, but also by two servants of his own. The angel presented himself with a drawn sword in his hand, but appears to have been only observed by the ass on which the prophet rode. The animal, alarmed by so uncommon a sight, first turned out of the way, then fell against the wall, and crushed the foot of her master ; and then, under the influence of still greater terror, fell down under him. All this excited the anger of Balaam, and, as a wicked man is almost always a cruel one, he smote the ass with his staff. He was so intent on his wicked errand, that he could not stay to inquire the cause of her thus treating him. One might have supposed that he would begin to think, that the hand of God was thus presenting obstacles to his progress ; but, alas ! thoughtlessness, and a neglect of observing the operations of the hand of Jehovah, destroy millions.

A miracle was now exerted to bring the prophet to reflection. The ass, hitherto, from the creation of the world itself, dumb, began to upbraid him, and to reason with him on the subject of his cruelty. It appears, however, that his passion was so violent, that he was not aware of

the extraordinary occurrence of a dumb animal being made to speak, and he persevered in his cruel threats, that if he possessed a sword he would destroy the beast which had long faithfully served him. Sinners are frequently so intent on their awful criminalities, that they are not aware of the obstacles God places in the way of their sinning against him, or of the threatenings which he utters against them, till it is too late, and then they blame him rather than themselves for their ruin.

Infidels have not failed to make this portion of the word of God a subject for ridicule. They have told us how very unfit the construction of an ass's jaws and mouth are for speaking; but have they forgotten, that even the heathen did not think that the accomplishment of these things was beyond the power of their deities, and that the sacred text expressly informs us, that "Jehovah opened the mouth of the ass"? A cause surely adequate to the effect; unless, indeed, it can be proved, either that Jehovah was unequal to the task, or that this was an occasion unworthy of so great a miracle being wrought. It has been very aptly said, that the circumstance of the ass speaking to Balaam must very powerfully impress his mind with the fact, that his own language was under the control of Jeho-

vah, and that he could make him speak contrary to his wishes.

At this moment, the eyes of Balaam were opened by supernatural agency, and he saw the angelic being by whom the ass had been obstructed. This must, indeed, very forcibly affect his mind. Manoah and his wife, the prophet's servant, and, indeed, all who have seen angels, have been filled with awe when they have beheld them; how much, then, must the wicked Balaam feel, when he saw Jehovah appear in the form of an angel! His sins would rush to his memory, and his conscience would bitterly reproach him. In terror and dismay he bowed down his head, fell flat on his face, and listened, with trembling, to the reproof and expostulation of so great a Being.

But, alas! the impressions of a serious kind made on the mind of a wicked man, are usually very transient. Felix trembles, but his agitation of mind is soon exchanged for mirth; Agrippa is almost persuaded to be a Christian, but his feelings on the subject are soon altered; and Balaam, feeling he is wrong, proposes for the moment to return to his home, and not pursue his journey; but, having permission from the angel to go on, even though it is accompanied with an intimation that he would fail in his object, he yet perseveres.

So intent are men on their own gratification, and so decidedly do they disbelieve the words of Jehovah, that nothing but Almighty power can draw them from their sins.

He soon arrives on the borders of Moab, where he is met by the king, and surrounded, no doubt, by great splendour and state. A gentle reproof is given by his majesty, who again reminds the prophet how he can exalt him to honour. Balaam, in reply, utters a very important truth, the existence of which he deeply regretted; and, by the manner in which he uttered it, he seems to profess feelings of piety, to which he was an utter stranger:—"Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say anything? The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak." This was all true, and was adapted to console Israel, while it would ultimately fill the hypocritical prophet and his royal employer with fear and dismay.

Great preparations were soon made for the important ceremony in prospect,—that of cursing the innocent Israelites. Conformably to the practice of the heathens in reference to their idols, seven altars are erected to the honour of Jehovah, and the sacrifices to be offered on each are prepared. Was Balaam ignorant, then, that the God of Israel was but one Lord, and that, to shew his

unity, he had commanded but one altar to be erected to his worship ; or was he determined, by the excess of the honours he would pay him, to propitiate his favour ? How foolish are those persons who refuse to adore God in the way he has himself appointed, and prefer their own plans, conceiving them to be wiser than his ! The sacrifices of such are an abomination to the Lord, who, in his jealousy, will assuredly punish those who offer them.

The preparations being made, we may imagine that a vast multitude are assembled to hear the anathemas of this celebrated prophet of the East upon the descendants of Israel. But what surprise and mortification must take possession of their hearts, when he opens his mouth, and, as directed by the Most High, delivers a most sublime address on the grandeur of Him who favours the Israelites—the protection they shall enjoy—the increase they shall receive—and closes all by declaring his fervent wish to die like them, and share their immortality !

Grieved with his conduct, and willing to attribute it to any cause but the right one, the monarch removes the prophet to another spot, and having attended to the preparatory ceremonies, the prophet again speaks ; but it is to confirm all that he has previously said,—to declare the im-

mutability and faithfulness of Jehovah,—to tell how favourably he regarded Israel,—and that he would continue to bless and protect them. Balak desires him now to cease from speaking, and “neither to curse them at all, nor bless them at all ;” but Balaam is compelled to reply, “Told not I thee, saying, All that the Lord speaketh, that I must do ?”

Once more shall Balaam attempt to curse those whom he himself has declared that God has blessed ; but he can only confirm the fact, that Jehovah has indeed blessed them ; and, to the mortification of the king of Moab, unfold to him what the Israelites shall hereafter do in conquering the nations who now opposed them ; and point to the coming of the great Messiah, whose day he saw, but whose grace he never shared. Having thus delivered his message, Balak, who had so earnestly entreated his presence and aid, parted from him in disgust. Bad men are always opposed to the word of God, because that word is opposed to their sins.

Strikingly as Balaam had declared the safety of Israel,—beautifully as he had described their happiness,—and earnestly as he wished to die like those who were the servants of God, he remained an enemy to them, and gave their foes advice to tempt Israel to sin, and thus led to the destruction

of no less than twenty-four thousand of their number. Well is it said, that "one sinner destroyeth much good." The wrath of God followed this impious man, till he was cut off by the sword, among many other enemies of his authority and government.

This important history, thus reviewed, tends to impress our minds with the futility of all the designs of men to injure those whom Jehovah designs to bless; and shews us, that he can restrain the enemies of his people, and compel them to bless those whom they would gladly curse. We learn that men may say very good things, and utter very important desires, and yet finally perish. We are instructed by the subject to rejoice in the blessings with which we are favoured, and to exercise a spirit of gratitude to their great Author, while we humbly use them to promote his glory. May it be the happiness of my readers to live the holy life, to die the triumphant death, and to share the exalted and eternal reward of those, who, interested in the grace of Christ, are righteous in the sight of God.

THE ENEMY DISCOVERED.

JOSHUA, VII.

He that reposes on his gold,
Consigns his heart to toil and trouble !
To visions—beauteous to behold—
That leave him, like a bursting bubble.

KNOX.

THAT the infinitely blessed God is benevolent in all the gifts he bestows upon man, might be very easily proved, and is universally admitted. The supply of our varied necessities, the protection he affords us against our enemies, the revelation with which he has indulged us of the way of happiness, and the prospect which those who believe his testimony have of future and eternal bliss, are all circumstances calculated to fill us with delight, and lead us to exclaim, with one who knew how to form a correct estimate on the subject, “ God is love !”

But it does not appear to be generally thought, that Jehovah makes so eminent a display of his

kindness in what he withholds as in what he gives. This arises from our ignorance, and from the perverseness of our minds, both of which lead us to entertain hard thoughts of God. He is infinitely wiser than we are, and though he keeps from us many things we might wish to possess, we have his own assurance that he will “withhold *no good thing* from them that walk uprightly.” Honour, wealth, and influence, are often withheld from the servants of Jehovah, but it would not be difficult to prove, that all these things have been, and might still be, injurious to them. It becomes us to entertain the conviction, that the Lord is

Good;—when he gives, supremely good;
Nor less when he denies.

The character of God's dealings with his people may be fully seen in the history of the Israelites; and the folly of murmuring against his all-wise arrangements is as strikingly evident. He was pleased, from motives of mere mercy, to select the family of Abraham as the favourites of his love; to whom he would impart the knowledge of his will, and on whom he would bestow peculiar favors, both on earth and in heaven. He delivered them from the slavery of Egypt, and, in his own good time, brought them to the

promised land of Canaan. But, because he would preserve them from a spirit of vain confidence and pride—keep them sensible of his greatness, and of their consequent dependence upon him—and detach them, in some degree at least, from the world, he forbade them to take for their use the riches of those whom they slew in battle, in order to obtain and keep possession of Canaan. While this arrangement would tend to secure the objects at which we have glanced, it would also operate so as to check a love for war—and prevent the heathen from saying that the Canaanites were destroyed merely that the Israelites might possess themselves of their riches.

Arrived in the land of Canaan, Joshua, the servant of the Lord, issued an order to the effect we have stated. It was plainly expressed, as the Divine laws always are, and the consequence of disobedience was fully declared. It was clearly the interest of every Israelite to obey it, seeing that obedience to the law of Jehovah was the condition on which their mercies as a nation were suspended. But, alas! a very short time elapsed before the disposition of man to transgress the laws of Heaven, notwithstanding the awful sanctions by which they are surrounded was fully developed.

Among others who heard the law as issued

by Joshua, was a man of the tribe of Judah, named Achan. He probably, at the moment, like all his neighbours, resolved to keep the requirement ; but he soon shewed that the strongest resolutions of man avail nothing in the hour of trial without the aid of Divine grace. He went up with the army to take the city of Jericho, and, having succeeded in this great object, he could not resist the temptation to possess himself of a share of the property, a fair opportunity of obtaining which presented itself.

There is scarcely a sin into which we are more likely to fall, or which is more awful in its consequences, than that of covetousness. It is delineated by the pencil of Eternal truth in the most glowing colours ; and the melancholy doom of those who have indulged in it is fearfully portrayed. It is pronounced to be *idolatry*—that sin which most directly strikes at the divine honour ; it is shewn to proceed from a distrust of the providence of God—to be injurious both to the man who cherishes so unhallowed a disposition, and to those by whom he is surrounded. It was this sin which ruined Balaam, and that led Judas to betray the Saviour ; this transgression injured Gehazi and Demas ;—it blunts the finer feelings of the soul of its possessor,—it stops the current of benevolence,—chains the object of

distress to his misery,—and sets the laws of heaven, and the contempt of men, alike at defiance. The prayer of the covetous man is shut out from heaven, and the inhabitants of earth unite to hate him.

That man may *last*, but never *lives*,
Who much *receives*, but nothing gives :
Whom none can love—whom none can thank—
Creation's blot—Creation's blank.

This awful crime was the ruin of Achan. Passing along the streets of Jericho, his attention was arrested by the sight of a rich and splendid garment, and some gold and silver, the value of the latter being from eighty to ninety pounds of our money. His desire for possessing these things was great, and though he knew that the curse of God rested upon them,—he had very recently heard the law which prohibited their being touched,—and had every reason to fear that melancholy consequences would follow such a transaction ; yet he takes them, and buries them under his tent, intending, at some future time, to appropriate them to such uses as, in his estimation, would add to his dignity and comfort.

And what harm, some will be ready to ask, was there in taking property that could be of no use to its original owner, and which had thus

been gained in war ? Let us ask such persons if there be no sin in violating a just and well-known law of Jehovah ? Is there no harm done in bringing down the Divine displeasure on our neighbours as well as on ourselves, and in scattering misery all around us ? We are so much accustomed to commit sin in our own persons, that we are ever willing to extenuate crimes in others. Oh that men would reflect more frequently on the character of the infinitely great and holy Jehovah, on his claims to their obedience, and on the duty they owe to their neighbours ; for these things would have a powerful influence in preventing them from falling into many sins which are now too frequently indulged in. If the question be again asked, what harm there can be in disobeying the commands of Jehovah ? we remind the inquirer of the awful miseries which disobedience has scattered over our world ; of the bodily diseases and the mental anguish it has inflicted on man ; of the prospect it places before him now ; and of the unutterable torment to which it introduces him beyond the grave. Let the furious elements of nature, the havocs of pestilence and famine, the dying sinner, and the wretch enduring the pains of perdition, proclaim in our ears, that it is an evil thing for us to disobey the laws of Heaven.

Achan, having deposited the property he had taken under his tent, imagined that the sin was secret, and would never be discovered. Had he forgotten, then, the declaration of Moses, the servant of God, "Be sure your sin will find you out?" Had he forgotten that the Most High witnessed the transaction, and did he suppose that he would take no notice of it? How ready are men to suppose that the threatenings of Jehovah will not be executed, and that therefore they may sin with impunity. Sin, however, will, sooner or later, be published to the world. Sometimes, in the most unexpected manner, the guilty culprit is dragged forth in the present state, his crimes exposed, and his punishment awarded. At some other times he succeeds in hiding his transgressions from man; but let him not forget that awful period when the declaration of the Lord shall be fulfilled, "There is nothing secret that shall not be manifest." Jehovah is jealous of his honour, must be faithful to his word, and inflexibly just in his government. If we rebel against Him, we must suffer the awful consequences of our guilt.

A few days elapsed, and Joshua, whose fame both among the Israelites and their enemies, was very great, sent three thousand men to attack the city of Ai, a place containing but a few inhabitants, and which had been represented to him as

capable of being very easily obtained. To his surprise, and the dismay of the people, however, his army was defeated, and six-and-thirty of them destroyed. Filled with discouragement and sorrow, Joshua and the elders of Israel humbled themselves before the Lord, and humbly inquired the cause of their being thus conquered. It was so great a change for them, and presented before them prospects so gloomy, that they might well imagine that some important reason existed for the apparent departure of that great Being who had hitherto fought their battles for them.

The God of wisdom and of goodness seldom allows those who humbly seek to him for wisdom to remain long in perplexity. Joshua is told, that Jehovah has withdrawn his favour because sin has been committed in the camp. He is instructed in what manner to find out the sinner and the transgression, and told in what way punishment shall be inflicted. On the following morning the people are assembled, lots are cast, and the culprit is discovered.

The scene that now presents itself to our view, of Achan being interrogated by Joshua, is a very affecting one. The affection, the piety, and the fidelity of the great leader of Israel, excite our admiration, and present to magistrates an example of the spirit in which they should at-

tend to their arduous duties. Joshua would rather have been excused from thus examining and punishing Achan ; but, as it must be done, he will exemplify a spirit becoming the man of God, and shew that the law is put into execution, not from a feeling of malignity to the sinner, but from an anxious concern for the public welfare.

It is rather pleasing to hear the ingenuous confession made by the culprit as to the crime he had committed ; but who does not regret that his confession did not precede his detection ? Confession of sin may come too late to be of any avail to us. It was thus with Achan and with Judas. If the day of mercy has passed, and the sentence of condemnation has issued from the lips of the Judge, the sinner may acknowledge his guilt, but, alas ! he must reap its consequences.

It is a dangerous thing to connive at sin. This seems to have been the case with the family of Achan ! for by withholding all knowledge of his crime from those to whom it ought to have been communicated, they made themselves partakers of his guilt. They were all assembled,—the things he had taken were produced,—guilt was brought home to the transgressors,—the righteous sentence of Jehovah was passed upon them,—“and all Israel stoned them with stones,

and burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones."

The effect of this solemn execution we may imagine to have been salutary. The Israelites would be more sensible than they had hitherto been of the importance of a diligent attention to the laws of God ; they would see that even secret transgressions would not be overlooked ; they would learn the importance of a due subjection to Joshua, the servant of the Lord ; and it would lead them to the exercise of the utmost vigilance over their own minds, lest they should indulge in the same sin.

In addition to these important lessons, we may learn from this melancholy detail of facts, that sin, and sin only, is the great destroyer of human happiness, and that it becomes us to guard against its commission ourselves, and to reprove it in others ; that however secretly wickedness may be perpetrated, it will assuredly be discovered and punished ; that even the vilest sinners should be treated by us, not only with justice, but with affection ; that for confession of iniquity to be acceptable to God, it should be made immediately we have incurred its guilt ; and that the fact of our wickedness injuring others as well as ourselves, should operate upon our hearts as a powerful motive to induce us to refrain from it.

THE
AFFECTIONATE DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.

RUTH, I.

Where is the breast, that e'er can rival Ruth
In tenderness, susceptibility,
And fervour of affection ?

ANON.

To a mind at all impressed with religion, it is a very pleasing thought, that all our affairs are under the superintendence of the Supreme Being. The most minute, as well as the most mighty events, are "ordered after the counsel of his own will."—"The very hairs of our heads are all numbered ; and not a sparrow falls to the ground without the notice of our heavenly Father." The Book of Ruth presents us with a series of striking and instructive events, and powerfully illustrates the kindness of the providential government of the blessed God ; shewing us how he can make the greatest evils subserve his gracious purposes towards his people.

In the commencement of the history, the inspired writer introduces to our notice a very interesting narrative of facts. In consequence of the sins of Israel, Lev. xxvi. 18—20, their land was visited with a sore famine, and many of its inhabitants were induced to leave the place endeared to them by their birth, and a thousand other tender associations, and sojourn in foreign countries. Among others who went into the land of Moab, was a man named Elimelech, his wife, who was called Naomi, and their two sons, who were named Mahlon and Chilion. There seems to have existed no pressing necessity for this family to leave their religious connexion ; since many of their neighbours were enabled to brave the horrors of the famine : besides which, Elimelech's family was but small, and he was a man of some property, for he "went out full : " but, alas ! anxiety to keep and increase their property often induces even the people of God to run into the way of temptation. Thus was it in the case of Lot ; and so, on the present occasion. After a continuance of some time, the good man died, leaving a widow, with her two sons, in a strange land. Here, however, the Lord provided for them. Though the poor woman had to mourn the loss of an affectionate husband, she had comfort in her sons ; who, soon after, took to

themselves "wives of the women of Moab." It is a matter of lamentation that they had not religion enough to induce them to select companions so intimate from among their own kindred : but the good hand of God was pleased in this case to overrule the event for good. Ruth's marrying an Israelite led to her conversion to God ; but let not this be considered an encouragement for "the sons of God" to run counter to his positive commands, in taking to themselves "wives of the daughters of men;" for let it be recollected, that her conversion was never made manifest till after the death of her husband ; and, probably, it was not the affectionate expostulations of her partner, but his death, in connexion with the holy life, the conversation, and the prayers of Naomi, which brought her ultimately to God.

The marriage of her sons afforded to Naomi, we may readily suppose, no small source of pleasure. Her fond imagination pictured scenes of enjoyment for her children for many years to come ; and when she reflected on her own distressing bereavement, she would present the ardent prayer that her sons and her daughters-in-law might be spared as blessings to each other ; "that *their* sons might be as plants grown up in their youth ; that their daughters might be as corner-stones polished after the similitude of a

palace." She hoped to see her grand-children rising up around her, and to have the opportunity of telling them, for their instruction and amusement, the scenes of her youth, and the acts of that beloved individual whom she had laid in the tomb, but whose name and memory she highly revered. But, alas ! our best joys are fleeting and short-lived ; in a very few years her sons were cut off, and their wives became widows. Death, the universal conqueror, spares no age ; he favours no class ; he cuts asunder the closest ties, and separates the most endearing connexions. The good old mother committed them to the grave ; wept over their ashes, and bowed with submission to him who possesses a right to do as he pleases with his creatures.

Having buried her dearest hopes, Naomi resolved on leaving the land of her sorrows, and returning to her pious kindred and acquaintance. She communicated her design to her daughters-in-law ; who, in a manner that indicated their kind regard to her, resolved to accompany her, at least a part of her journey. When they had proceeded some distance, the venerable woman, feeling for their situation, and anxious to save them from fatigue, wished them to "return, each to her mother's house ;" expressing the kindest desires on their behalf : "the Lord deal kindly with you,

as ye have dealt with the dead and with me : the Lord grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. 'Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voice and wept.'" Who can read unmoved the description of a scene like this ? How suitable a subject for the pencil of the painter ! How many tender associations rise up in each of their minds ! One almost hears the prayer of this aged widow for these her daughters in affliction ; and we wonder not to hear them saying, "Surely we will return with thee unto thy people." Such was the resolution of each for the moment. Are not many of our pious resolutions the result of an equally transient feeling ? If so, it is no wonder that, like Orpah, we are soon moved from our purpose, and turn back into the world. The good woman seems to have indulged the apprehension, that mere natural affection led them to speak thus, and again presses them to return. Orpah consented—kissed her, and returned : but Ruth possessed a regard to her that was more than natural. Her mind had been impressed with the importance of religion ; she had witnessed Naomi's holy conduct ; and had become convinced of the superior excellence of her character ; and "Ruth clave unto her : " nor could any argument that Naomi used, with a view to

try her sincerity, induce her to depart from her purpose, “for Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee ; for whither thou goest, I will go ; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge : thy people shall be my people, and thy God, my God ; where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried : the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.” How decided her conduct ! How evident a proof of attachment, not merely to her person, but to her religion ! And, oh ! with what joy must Naomi have been filled, when she discovered the genuine conversion of her daughter-in-law ! Will the reader favour me with his attention, while I attempt to investigate the principles on which the determination of Ruth was founded—explain the import of the determination—and urge some motives to induce him to adopt it as his own ?

Let us, then, investigate the principles on which the determination of Ruth was founded. It is scarcely necessary to remark, that this resolution exhibits a change of heart ; for however amiable may be the manners of a person, however generous his natural disposition, or however polished his education, yet does there exist in the soul no real regard to the religion of the Bible, till it has been renewed by the grace of

God. This grace led Ruth to the determination before us, which was founded on faith in Divine revelation. She had been educated an heathen, in a land whose inhabitants knew not the true God. But perhaps her deceased husband, and certainly her pious mother-in-law, had unfolded to her the truths of the religion of Israel, and directed her attention to that great Messiah to whom the types and sacrifices all pointed, and “the testimony of whom was the spirit of prophecy.” Enlightened by the Spirit of God, she fully credited the truths of his word; and, convinced at once of the vanity of the world, and of the infinite superiority of the religion founded on “the oracles of God,” she abandoned her own country, her people, and her profession of idolatry, and determined henceforth to rank with the people of the God of heaven.

This resolution was founded, too, on holy love. True religion, whether it be considered in its nature, its origin, or its effects, may be summed up in this one word—LOVE. Its great author, “God, is love.” Its design is, to make us, like our Maker, full of love; and “love is the fulfilling of the law.” Ruth had love to Jehovah. Had she continued in her natural state of alienation from her Maker;—had she still been numbered with the “haters of God,” we had never heard this lan-

guage proceeding from her lips. Perhaps, like some of my readers, she had been the votary of pleasure; and had fixed her affections on the vanities of the present world. Many a prayer had been presented to God on her behalf; and, at length, the Holy Spirit is pleased to open the eyes of her understanding; to shew her the loveliness of the Divine character, the perfect rectitude of his law, and the obligations she lay under to obey it. Thus was she loved by the Supreme Being, and is now constrained to love him in return, and freely to engage in his service. She loved the cause of Holiness. Perhaps some of my readers wonder why we can love religion: there is, in their view, every thing in it that is discouraging and gloomy. And did we not know, kind reader, the awful depravity of the human heart, and its liability to make the greatest mistakes, we should wonder that you can reject it. Ruth once thought that happiness was to be found in the world: but she afterwards happily discovered that it was only in religion. Here are solid pleasures! Here are durable riches! Here are unfading honours! This she saw, and resolved to engage in the service of God. She was influenced by love to the people of Jehovah. One of the first and clearest evidences of our return to God is attachment to his

people, because they belong to him. We see them as "the excellent of the earth;" in them we place "all our delight," because they bear the image of the Saviour; they are pursuing the Divine glory—they are travelling to that happy world, where they hope to reside for ever with Jesus. Thus, loving the people of God, "Ruth clave to Naomi," and resolved to adopt holy people as her companions.

Equally apparent is it, that she was led to this determination by genuine humility, and a sense of her need of religious intercourse. While the proud worldling disdains the thought of being associated with the people of Jehovah, who are generally regarded with contempt; those who have been enlightened by Divine grace, who have felt their own ignorance, and have learnt the superior excellence of the righteous, know that many advantages result from a connexion with them; and, therefore, they say, like Ruth, "Entreat me not to leave thee." Few things present better evidence of genuine conversion, than a deep conviction of our ignorance, and of our need of instruction in the way to heaven. There are some persons, who, having received an education superior to many by whom they are surrounded, feel a spirit of lofty independence, and imagine themselves qualified to

teach rather than to learn : but when humbled by religion, they discover their ignorance, and are ready to ask even the weakest Christian for advice and encouragement. In other things, perhaps, Ruth might know more than her mother-in-law ; but in religion she felt Naomi's superiority ; she had discovered her own liability to fall into the temptations of Satan, and the snares of the world, and wished to enjoy intercourse with an aged believer, who was "not ignorant of his devices." This was a praiseworthy resolution. Apollos, with all his eloquence and knowledge of the Scriptures, gladly associated with Aquila and Priscilla, that he might learn "the way of the Lord more perfectly ;" being assured that, "he that walketh with wise men shall be wise."

But let us briefly explain the import of the determination itself. Ruth did not utter this language without thought ; nor did she enter on a life of religion without counting the cost. The determination implies, the renunciation of idolatry. "Thy God shall be my God." She had been brought up among pagans ; she had been accustomed to bow the knee before dumb idols ; but having now been taught the folly of this worship, she dedicated her service to the God of Israel. Perhaps my reader imagines that there

exists no present necessity to exhort persons, at least in this country, to forsake idolatry : but, alas ! do not too many set their hearts on the world, and give up their best affections to its pursuits and its pleasures ? Is not the creature often loved more than the Creator ? Are there not many, of whom Paul would say, “whose god is their belly ?” These idols must all be renounced before we can acceptably serve the true God.

We may farther observe, that this determination includes a solemn engagement, notwithstanding every difficulty, to abide by the people of God.—“Where thou goest, I will go ; where thou lodgest, I will lodge ; where thou diest, I will die,” &c. It is a fact, which we are by no means anxious to conceal, that sorrows attend a connexion with the people of God. If we adhere to them, we shall meet with persecution from the world, and often with trials from the church. Notwithstanding this, when our hearts are properly influenced by a sense of the advantages arising from such a connexion, we shall, like Moses, “choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season ;” and, like Ruth, say to them, “entreat me not to leave you.” Among the people of Jehovah we are instructed in the knowledge of the Di-

vine will, comforted in the day of trial, reprovèd and admonished in the hour of danger, encouraged in our conflict with the powers of darkness, and helped forward in the way to heaven.

Not less does the determination imply an entire devotedness to the work of God. It is not the spirit of indecision which is breathed in the language of Ruth, but of entire consecration to the cause she had espoused. There is an object the people of God have to promote; a spirit they have to exhibit; duties they have to discharge; and these things require the exertions of all our energies. To the great business of religion, Ruth brought her whole soul: she felt that if religion was of importance at all, it was all-important, and as such she embraced it and discharged its duties. Such a line of conduct would I recommend to my readers, and beg leave to urge some motives to induce them to adopt the determination as their own. We are swayed in our decisions on important matters by what appears to us the greatest means of happiness. The greatest possible good, then, may be urged why you should adopt the resolution of adherence to the service of God; as it will most entirely promote your respectability and happiness. Resolving on a union with the people of God, you will be most effectually freed from the company of the vile

and abandoned. The drunkard and the swearer, the sabbath-breaker and the whoremonger, with the long list of guilty criminals, will keep at a distance from you, and shun you as though you had the plague. The pleasures arising from an attention to divine ordinances, from association with the people of God, from communion with Heaven, will all be yours. Really one in heart with the people of God on earth, you are united to the "spirits of just men made perfect" in heaven. The wise and good regard persons like Ruth with esteem : angels in heaven behold them with delight ; and, above all, God himself bestows on them his infinite favours. Nor are such characters blest only in their own persons, but they are made blessings to others. By espousing the cause of religion, you become witnesses for the Supreme Being, promote his cause, and are blessings to all around you.

Thus you will increase the happiness of your pious friends. I am sure I may stand forth as the representative of every pious parent in the world, and say, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth." Nothing on earth, my reader, can equal the happiness of the good man, when he sees his neighbours around him becoming decided for the cause of religion. For you the pious relative,

the zealous Christian, and the affectionate minister, often pray. O! let them not pray in vain, but give up yourselves to the service of your Creator.

Thus you will most effectually glorify God. The grand design of our creation is, that we may promote the glory of our Maker, by shewing forth the greatness of his character, and our sense of the value of his benefits. And never can we do this so effectually, as by submitting to his government, and obeying his laws. The man who does not thus glorify Jehovah, is in a state of rebellion against him.

Once more : by embracing the service of God, you secure your future happiness. This is true as it respects the present world. The piety of Ruth led to her comfort and happiness on earth. "Them that honour me, I will honour;" is the declaration of the Deity; and thousands beside Ruth have bettered their worldly circumstances by religion. But what is the possession of wealth, compared with the joys of communion with Christ, and all the blessings he bestows upon us, while in this waste, howling wilderness? But supposing we should, while here, remain poor, how vast the enjoyments of religion beyond the grave!

It endless happiness secures,
And frees from endless death!

“Godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”

In closing this paper, we remark : How amiable was the character of Naomi in encouraging Ruth. —What encouragement is here given to pious parents to educate their children in the fear of God.—And how abiding the nature of religious affection ; extending not merely to time, but beyond the grave. May the resolution of Ruth be that of each of my readers ; may they possess her religion, and experience her enjoyments.

THE HAPPY GLEANER.

RUTH II.—IV.

Then throw that shameful pittance from thy hand,
But ill applied to such a rugged task !
The fields, the master, all my Fair ! are thine ;
If to the various blessings which thy house
Has on me lavish'd, thou wilt add the bliss—
That dearest bliss—the power of blessing thee:

THOMSON.

To the philosopher and man of general learning, it is a pleasing employment to study the history of human nature. He selects an individual, and marks with interest the effects produced on his feelings and conduct by passing events ; and thus is the observer furnished with the wisdom which guides the statesman in the government of nations, and influences the merchant in his dealings with mankind. The Christian is not uninterested in speculations of this kind ; but he has a far more delightful employment in tracing the operations of Divine grace on the soul ; in marking the influence of holy and heavenly principles

on the experience and conduct. Here we see a change made in nature itself; the lion is transformed into a lamb, or the amiable character is made still more lovely. Thus we are led to admire the grace of God—to desire its operations on our own hearts—and to be concerned for its spread through the world. On these accounts it is, that religious biography has always been considered so profitable a study; and certainly no mode of writing, when judiciously executed, is more calculated to answer every good purpose.

It is a distinguishing excellence of the Bible, that its characters are drawn without exaggeration or false colouring. The sacred writers relate a series of facts connected with the conduct of individuals; and it is from reading these simple, unadorned narratives, that our minds receive their impressions, as to the general character of the persons who pass before us. Who can read the Book of Ruth, without feelings of the greatest pleasure and admiration? Who can behold a young female descended from royalty, for the sake of religion, bidding adieu to her native land—taking leave of her earliest associates—going to a strange country—and becoming a gleaner in the harvest-field for the support of herself and her aged mother-in-law, without adoring

the grace of God which can produce such lovely characters in this degenerate world ?

With feelings like these, let us advance to view the conduct of Ruth the Moabitess. Under the influence of genuine religion, she had accompanied the pious Naomi to the poor, but most interesting of all towns—that of BETHLEHEM. But what was she to do there ? She had been accustomed to enjoy the richest bounties of Providence : her industry had never been called forth to obtain a livelihood. She had been gratified, probably, in all her wishes, first by affectionate parents, and afterwards by an indulgent husband : but now she was the companion of a poor old woman, a widow, one who had been rich, but now, alas ! so poor, and so changed in appearance, as scarcely to be known by her old acquaintances. Here we see the triumph of principle, and mark the power of religion ! Possessing this, Ruth was not afraid to be poor ; for, like Moses, she had “an eye to the recompense of reward.” She did not indulge in hard and murmuring thoughts of God. Naomi might manifest an unholy and discontented spirit, and say, “the Lord hath dealt bitterly with me ;” but Ruth had acquired the happy art of bringing her mind down to her circumstances ; and she cheerfully entered the field—associated with the poor—endured the heat

and burden of the day—and, with thankfulness to God and man, gathered the precious fruits of the earth for the sustenance of herself and her honoured and pious relative. How attentive was she to her parent ! How courteous to all around her ! How industrious in the discharge of her duty ! And what a noble soul did she display in becoming a humble reaper ! Yes, Ruth presented, in the harvest field, a far more lovely and attractive object than our modern belles of fashion, who owe their honours, not to solid worth—not to the exalted principles by which they are governed—but to their dress, their tinsel accomplishments, or to their respectable connexions.

Honour and shame from no condition rise ;
Act well your part, there all the honour lies.

In what a singular manner did Divine Providence appear to raise Ruth in her circumstances and in society ! “ The tender mercies of God are over all his works ;” but those who love him are the objects of his peculiar regard. To them he maketh his angels ministering spirits ; for them he raises up friends in the day of adversity ; and with them he maketh even their enemies to be at peace. What a series of pleasing events were attendant on Ruth’s gleaning ! We mar-

vel at the providence which led her to this field. She knew nothing of Boaz being a relative. She was unacquainted with his being the owner of the field ; “ her hap was to light on a part of the field that belonged to Boaz :” all appeared to be mere accident, but all was under the direction of that God who “ numbers the very hairs of our heads.” “ It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps ;” all our movements, however trifling they may appear to us, are under the government of Jehovah, and are accomplishing the designs of his infinite wisdom. We admire the character of Ruth herself. How much modesty, industry, courteousness, and humility, were apparent in her whole conduct ! All around were pleased with her deportment. There is something dignified in the character of the truly pious, which excites the admiration even of the thoughtless and profane. When in the company of such persons, we seem to live in another atmosphere, to possess a new order of feelings, and to find a restraint on our wicked inclinations. When Boaz entered the field, with the simplicity and piety of the ancient patriarchs, he observed a stranger ; and whether he was struck with her dignified mien, with her amiable deportment, or with the marked respect his men paid to her, we know not ; but it is probable, that He who “ has

the hearts of all men in his hands, and who turneth them which way soever pleaseth him," inclined Boaz to inquire about her ; and when he found she was related to him, he did not despise her, he did not order her removal, and forbid her again to enter his field ; but he commanded his men to treat her kindly, and encouraged her to take whatever portion she pleased, of the food provided for his servants. His men were further instructed to let fall some ears of grain for her, that she might have an abundance. How deep the impression of her gratitude to Boaz ! How full of joy was Naomi, when she saw, in the evening, the result of her day's labour in the harvest field ! And how does the fascinating story twine around our hearts, and fill us with an interest unknown to the readers of tales and romances ! They gratify our imaginations, and furnish us with food to cherish our natural depravity ; but here the angel of truth enlightens our minds, kindles our best affections, and softens and sanctifies our souls.

So far the history is distinguished for its simplicity ; but we are now arrived at a part of the narrative which seems to need some illustration and defence. I allude to the advice given by Naomi to Ruth, as to the manner in which a marriage was to be brought about between her

and Boaz. I fear that Naomi cannot, in this instance be entirely freed from blame ! but there are several things to be heard in extenuation of her conduct, which it would not, by any means, be advisable for us to imitate.

Let it then be remembered, that the manners of those times, and of that country, were peculiarly simple, and free from those refinements which modern vices have compelled us to adopt. Naomi, too, knew the pious and chaste characters both of Boaz and Ruth. Added to which, Boaz was an old man ; the Jews say he was eighty years of age, and that he was remarkable for his gravity. Besides this, Naomi considered them in the eye of God, by the appointment of his law, as husband and wife ; and it appears, that had he been, as they supposed, the nearest relative, she would have had a right to make upon him the demand of marriage. We repeat it, however, Naomi cannot probably be freed from blame. Her conduct proves that the most pious persons are imperfect ; and it leads us to admire the wise providence of God which could overrule this event for good.

But to return : We are soon called to see this amiable young woman, who had so cheerfully sacrificed the comforts of this life for the sake of religious privileges, and who had so honourably

worked with her hands for the maintenance of herself and her mother-in-law, become the wife of Boaz, a man of piety and of wealth : she was raised to a station in society for which her birth, her education, and her piety had eminently fitted her. The sphere of her usefulness was thus considerably enlarged ; her sorrows were forgotten in the house of her husband ; she became the happy mother of children, and provided for the venerable mother in Israel, who had manifested so much concern for her welfare. Nor must it be forgotten, that the blessed God conferred a high honour on this Gentile, by placing her among those from whom the Messiah should spring.

We learn from this narrative, the mysterious nature of divine Providence : "He raiseth up one and putteth down another ; his footsteps are in the great deep and his paths are not known." We see the advantages connected with decision of religious character. Ruth went, notwithstanding every forbidding and trying circumstance, wherever she believed it to be her duty to go ; she was more afraid of sin than of poverty ; she honoured God, and God honoured her. We feel the propriety of committing all our concerns to Jehovah, depending on his providence for future supplies : "in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

Fear God, ye saints, and you will then
Have nothing else to fear:
Make you his service your delight,
Your wants shall be his care.

And, finally, we see the importance of conducting ourselves in a suitable manner in the station in which divine Providence has placed us ; not encouraging a spirit of restless anxiety and ambition, but resting assured, that, if God pleases, he can raise us in the scale of society ; and that, if consistent with his infinitely wise and gracious plans, it will be done. To please him, and to be governed by the principles of his word, should be our constant aim ; and in some way or other, in this world or the next, he will prove the truth of his own declaration : " Them that honour me, I will honour."

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